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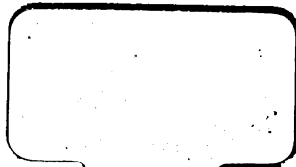
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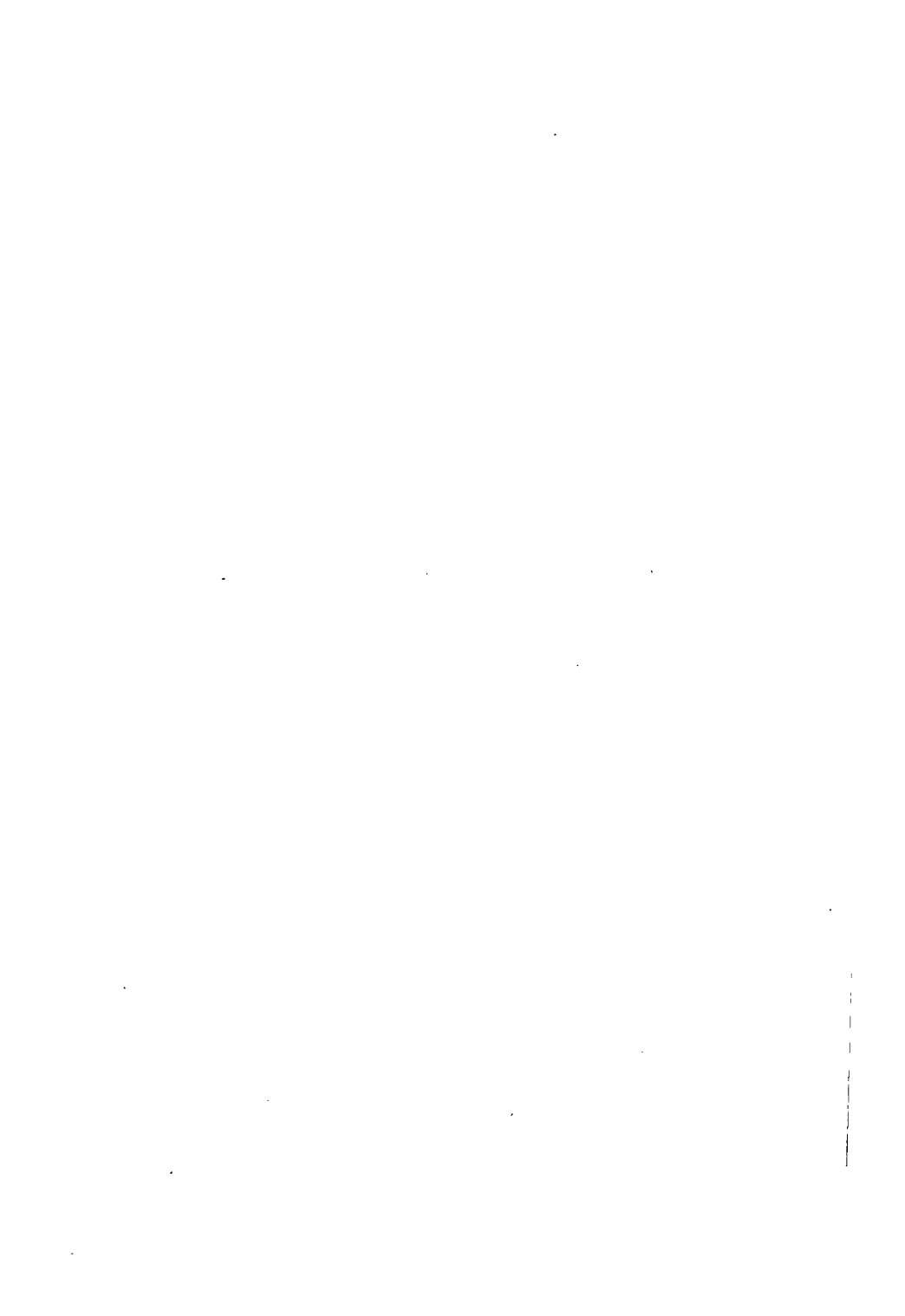


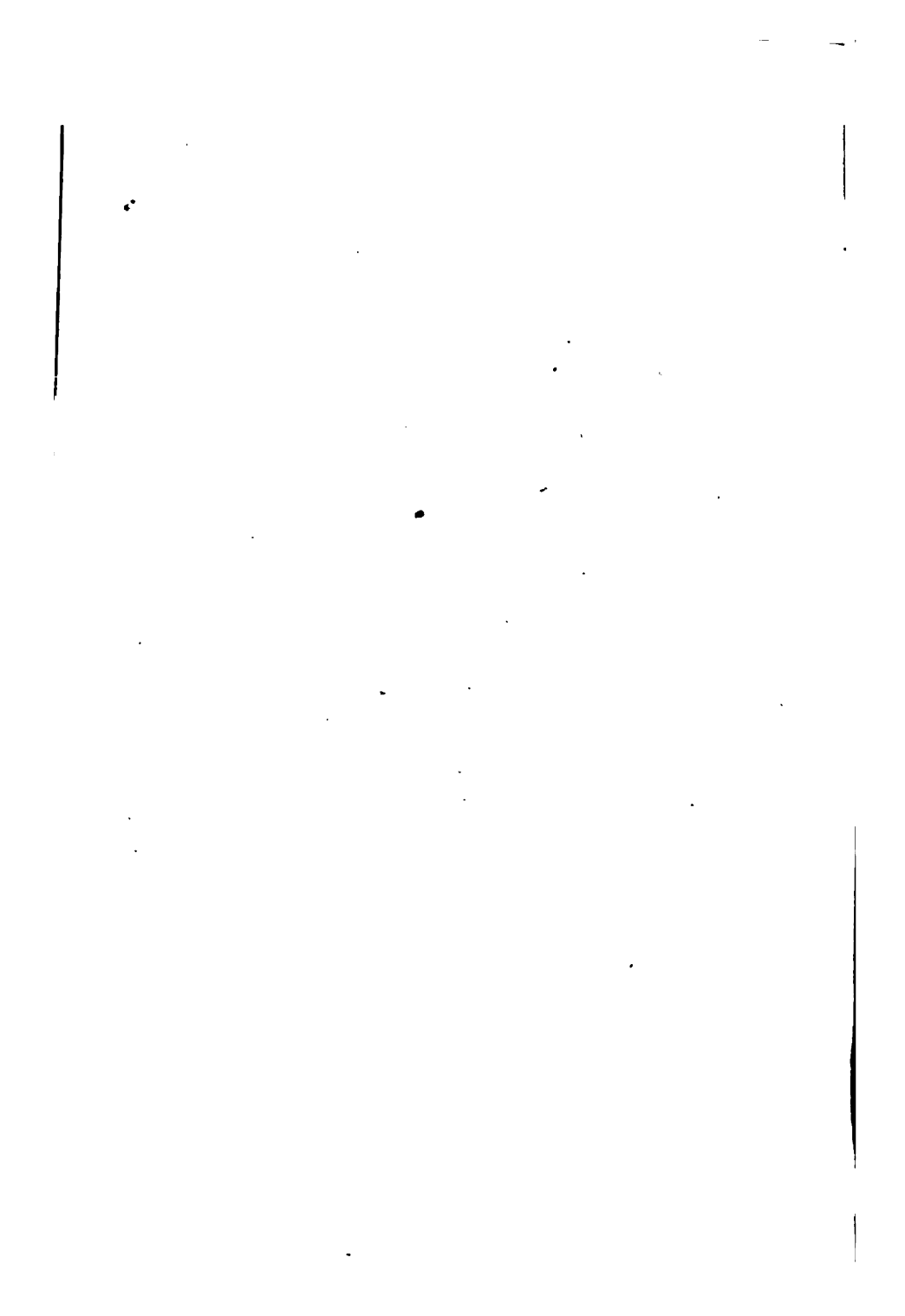




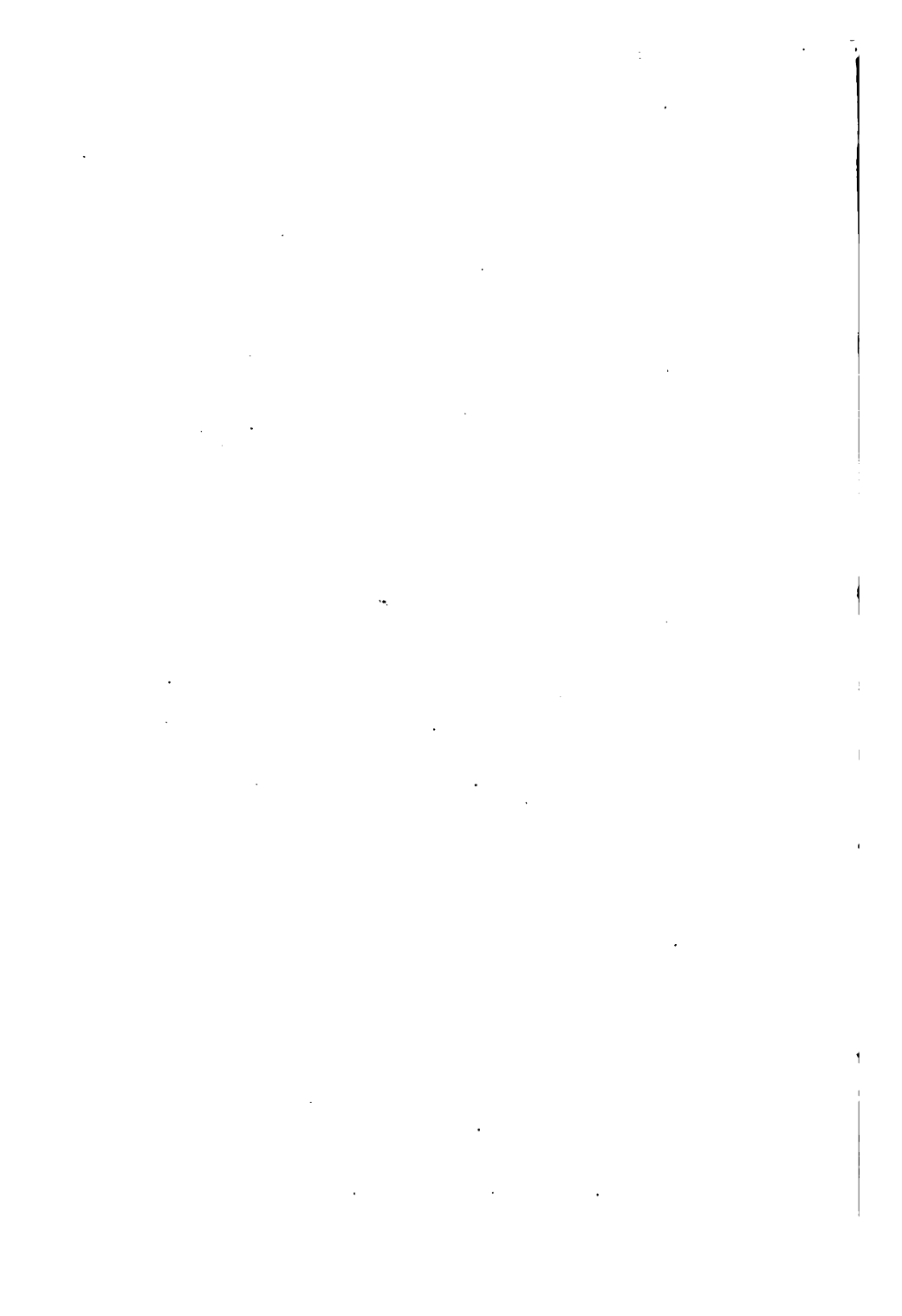
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HARRY DISNEY.





# HARRY DISNEY.

*An Autobiography.*

EDITED BY

ATHOLL DE WALDEN.

Give me, instead of Beauty's bust,  
A tender heart, a loyal mind,  
Which with temptation I can trust,  
Though never linked with error find.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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## PREFACE BY THE EDITOR.

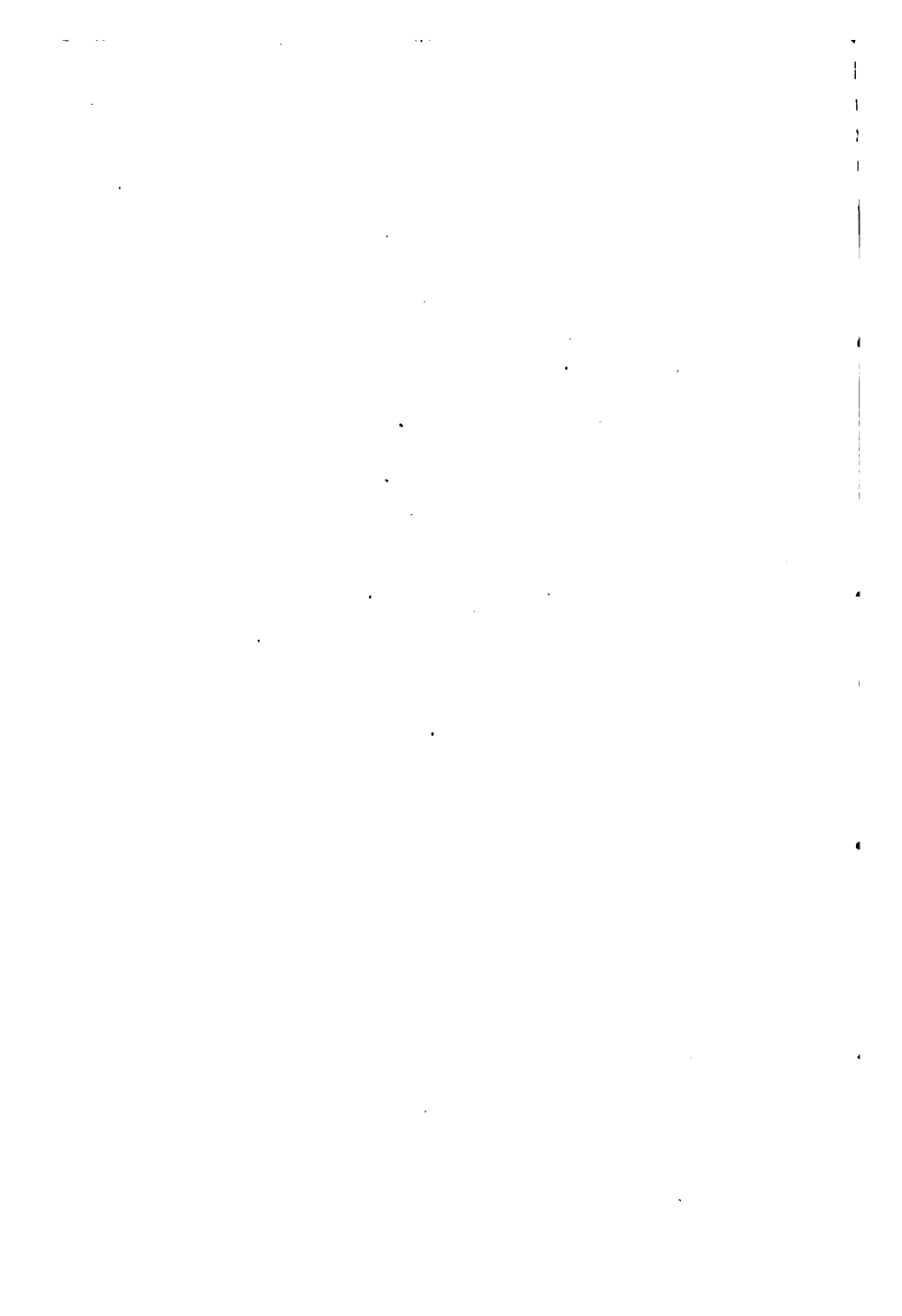
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IN laying the following pages before the world my task has been an easy one. I give them precisely as they were given to me. From many of Mr. Disney's remarks I dissent; of some I even disapprove. But it seemed to me fairer to let Mr. Disney tell his own story in his own way, than to use it as materials for an original work of my own. Mr. Disney's unhappy experience of life has imparted a bitterness to his remarks on modern society, of which I cannot altogether approve; although I believe that there are very many who would assert that his strictures are not at all more severe than society deserves.

To all who remember Mr. Disney, the details of his autobiography will be, I am sure, as interesting as they have been to me.

A. DE W.

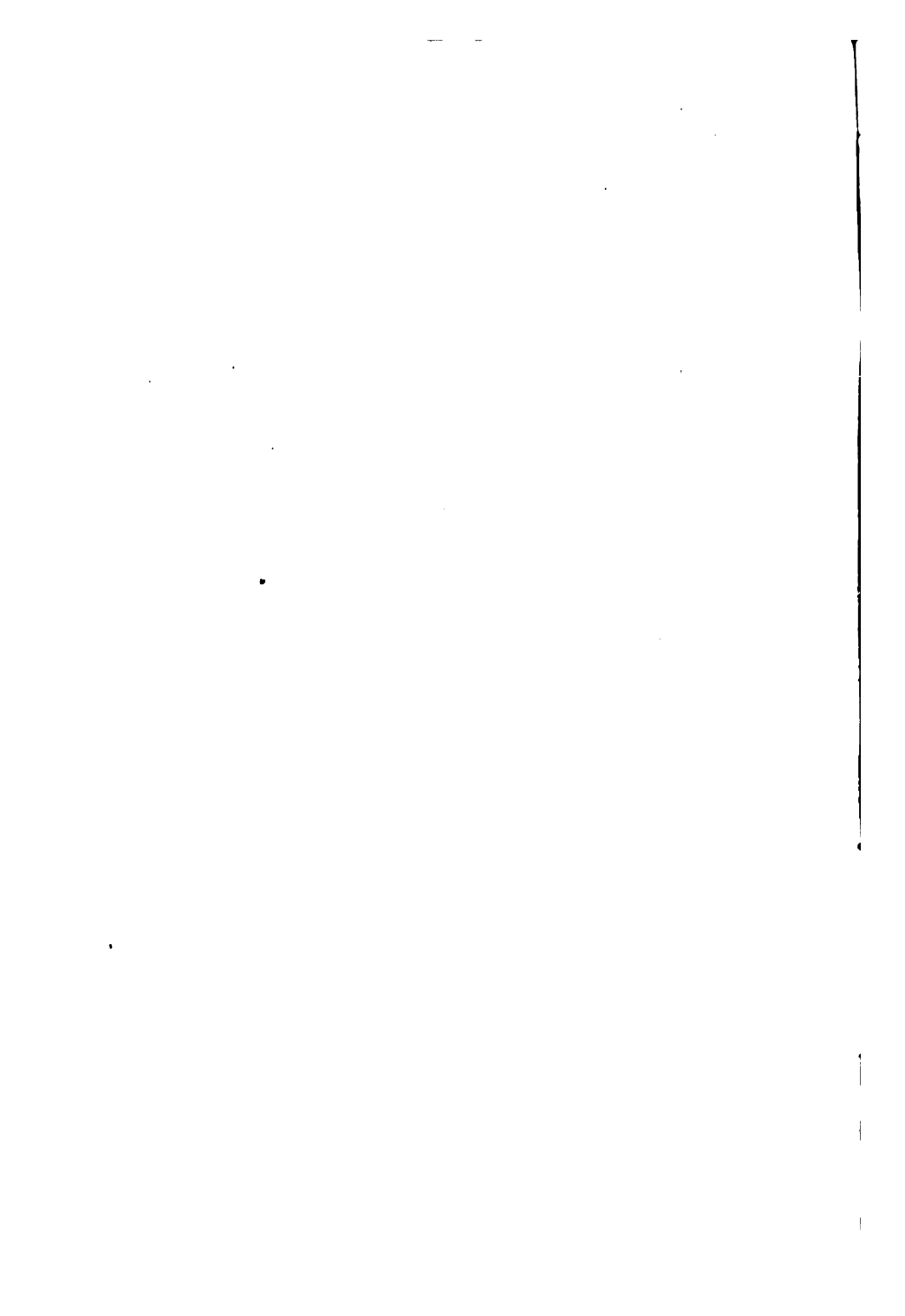
The Temple,  
April 1871.



## CONTENTS OF VOL. I.



CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE IDEAL PORTRAIT . . . . .	I
II. THE ORIGINAL . . . . .	24
III. FIRST ACQUAINTANCESHIP . . . . .	49
IV. AT COOMBE ROYAL . . . . .	80
V. LORD EDGEWARE . . . . .	109
VI. MODERN SOCIETY . . . . .	144
VII. WALLS HAVE EARS . . . . .	178
VIII. THE LETTERS . . . . .	208
IX. MY GENTLE COZ . . . . .	243
X. AT PRINCES-GARDENS . . . . .	266





# HARRY DISNEY.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE IDEAL PORTRAIT.

'O fearful meditation! when, alack,  
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?  
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back,  
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?  
O, none, unless this miracle have might,  
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.'

**Y**OU ask me, my dear Atholl, to write those chapters of my biography which will throw a light upon the reasons that have induced me to quit the world, and to alienate myself from the faith of my fellow-countrymen. Often in the calm solitude of my present retreat

have I intended employing my leisure hours in sketching the most prominent features of my autobiography; but as often as I have commenced have I desisted. 'To rake up the painful memories of the past, and once more to make public facts which had better be forgotten, seemed on closer consideration to be fruitlessly reopening an old wound. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* was the motto that stared me in the face, and made me throw down my pen in disgust before I had written fifty lines. Your letter, however, places the subject before me in a new light, and I hasten to execute your wish. Perhaps if the story of my life fail in adorning a tale, it may succeed in pointing a moral—at least, I hope so.

I shall sketch with but a hasty hand my earlier years. All that is of interest in my career begins with that acquaintanceship which has led to results so strange and solemn.



My father, as you know, was a clergyman of an old Devonshire family, and held one of the best livings in the county ; but he lived up to the extent of his income, and, like many of his brethren, made no provision for the future. He was cold and haughty, full of prejudices and odd fancies. Proud of his old name and family position, he limited his circle of acquaintances to those who were either his superiors or equals among the gentry of the neighbourhood. He preached occasionally on Sunday, whilst his curates read prayers and visited the poor. With the exception of these hebdomadal discourses and the most attentive hospitalities offered to the archdeacon and occasionally to the bishop of his diocese, his clerical duties sat lightly upon him. He was keenly fond of sport of all kinds ; was an excellent shot, rode well to hounds, and was as enthusiastic a fisherman as only a Devonshire man can

be. As rector of an important parish, a man of family, and chairman of quarter sessions, he was treated with rather more deference than generally falls to the lot of country clergymen.

My father belonged to the old school of parsons, who thought it far more important that a clergyman should be a gentleman than a religious or even an educated man. He had a horror of any of his brethren who were not Oxford or Cambridge men, and would never admit that a degree obtained from any but those Universities was a degree at all. He was very particular in his tastes, and nothing could be in better keeping than the various appointments of his establishment—from his stables to his orchid-houses. He was very generous in his hospitalities; and though abstemious himself, the neighbouring gentry knew, by frequent experience, that the dinners and the wines

of the Rector of Lyscombe were well worth the drive of five or ten miles. My father read very little, and, beyond spending half-an-hour occasionally in filling-up his skeleton sermon, never paid any attention to study. Reading, I found out afterwards, always affected his head, and made him liable to epileptic fits. He passed his time chiefly in superintending the improvements going on in his garden (of which he was very proud), physicking his horses, and offering suggestions to his workpeople—or else in visiting the different families around.

I have said that my father was a queer man; and certainly, on some subjects, he entertained very odd ideas. When he dined by himself, he commenced his dinner with some fruit, and then dined *backwards*; beginning with sweets, and so on through cheese, game, joint, fish, till he ended with soup. He kept an excellent table,

and made no secret about his being a *gourmet*. 'When we are young,' he used to say, 'we care only for good society or good sport; when we arrive at middle age, we begin to yearn after a good heart and real solid worth; and when we have reached maturity, and find that fashion is only vexation of spirit, and friendship but a social expression, we fully appreciate what an excellent thing, what a pearl beyond price, is—not a wife, but a good cook. The pleasures of the table never fail to console us in our sorrows or anxieties. Henry I., they say, never smiled after the death of his son—well, he died from over-eating lampreys!'

Another odd thing my poor father did, was (when his house was free from visitors) to put all the clocks three hours forwards, and make his household regulate their habits accordingly. At times he had fits of the blackest depression, which caused

him to shut himself up in his room, see no one, and imagine that every one was plotting some conspiracy against his life or some of his worldly interests.

He was bitterly sarcastic, and, like most men of that disposition, very fickle. He would take a strong fancy to a man one day, and dislike him the next. As a rule, he disliked people far more than he liked them. With the members of his family he had quarrelled over and over again, till at last all intercourse was broken off between them and him, and I was forbidden to see or visit any of them. Our family had from time immemorial been noted for its intestine hates. Fathers had hated their sons, brothers their brothers, so frequently among us, that we were called the 'happy family;' and to hate like a Disney passed into a local proverb. I soon learnt the cause of this unhappy family failing.

I was my father's only son, and on me he lavished every kindness that parental affection could prompt. I was educated at home by one of his curates, who was a most able scholar; for my father entertained the strongest objections to English public schools, regarding them as hot-beds of vice, which not unfrequently lead to the ruin of the purity of youth. He was an old Etonian, and drew his conclusions, I suppose, from experience. As a boy I was extremely fond of reading, and made such progress in my studies, that my tutor prophesied great things of me when I should go up to Oxford. But my chief pleasure was in sketching and painting, for which I early showed a great aptitude. I would spend all my leisure in drawing heads and figures, and then colouring them.

My father, seeing that I possessed a precocious amount of artistic talent, thought it

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a desirable thing for me to cultivate it; and accordingly three times a week I took lessons from an artist who came over from Exeter to teach me. How I longed for those days when, instead of Latin and Greek, and logic and mathematics, I sat copying Roman heads and Neapolitan peasants under my master's eye! By the time I was nineteen I had made such progress in art, and evinced such a deep love for it, that, had it not been for my father's country-gentleman's idea, that to be an artist was not a gentleman-like profession, I should have asked to go to Rome instead of to Oxford. But my father intended me for the Church, and I knew would never sanction such a request. Art, in his eyes, was all very well as a *délassement*, but as a profession it was, both socially and pecuniarily, a poor thing.

In looking back on my past life, I can

see how in me the child was father of the man. As a boy, my great fault was a weakness of character and irresolution that made me unable to resist anything which strongly tempted me. My tutor used to put me on my guard against this natural failing, and tell me that, unless I tried to get the better of it, I should always be a vacillating character, and dependent on the will of others. And yet, in spite of this vacillation, when my mind was once made up about a thing, I was as obstinate and as difficult to turn from my purpose as a Scotchman. There was something of my father's disposition in me too as a youth, which contact with the world in after life happily tended to dispel. I cared very little for society; and instead of dancing at the different Devonshire archery meetings, or accompanying my father in his frequent visits to the different country houses around



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us, I preferred to ride out alone, or to wander over the Tor walks with some volume of poetry in my hand or my sketch-book, and amuse myself by meditating upon life in general and my future in particular.

At that time I was a moody, egotistic lad, and set up to be that least original of all characters, a cynic. But as my ideas of life and manners were derived solely from books (for my father was careful of what he said in my presence), and not from intercourse with the world, my cynicism, like that of most students who acquire their knowledge by theory and not by practice, was untrue and exaggeratedly bitter. I would sneer at the different people about us, and amuse my father by mimicking their peculiarities; and the moment anything or anybody became popular, I would mercilessly run it, him, or her down to the lowest depths of disparagement. In fact, with the

priggishness of youth I looked upon myself as an original genius, who differed from everybody else because endowed with intellect superior to the generality of the world. Whatever was generally received I opposed; whilst everything that was doubtful or visionary in philosophy, or wild and dangerous in politics, I strenuously recommended. But in the society of my father's curate I kept all my opinions to myself; for my tutor was a sound scholar, and one who would tolerate no nonsense from me, but refute my best arguments in a moment.

When I expressed my wild and foolish sentiments to some of my father's congregation, they would look grave and meaningly at one another. It was only just before I went up to Oxford, where I had been fortunate enough in obtaining a scholarship at Oriel, that I became aware why people, instead

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of laughing at my dangerous opinions and sweeping assertions, regarded me with a gravity that was almost sad. I will relate the incident that enlightened me.

One day I was talking to the house-keeper, who had been my nurse when I was a boy, about my mother, of whom I knew nothing beyond that she was the daughter of an Irish baronet, and had died shortly after my birth. My old nurse was very fond of me, and, like all old women, extremely garrulous. I am afraid that, like nurses of another description, she had been indulging on that occasion in 'something to drink;' for she was extremely communicative, and related to me a family secret that had been till then most carefully concealed from me. It was this. For generations the fearful curse of insanity had constantly been breaking out in my family. My great-grandfather had died in a *maison*

*de santé* in France; my grandfather had committed suicide; my father's eldest brother had died in a private asylum; and as for my female cousins, nearly every one that had married had died of mania either hysterical or puerperal.

It is impossible for me to give you an idea of the amount of nervous torture and morbid horror this intelligence caused me. The fear that the same fate which had befallen so many of my race might also be in store for me haunted me at times like a dream. At first I remained for days in a kind of stupor, my energies utterly paralysed, and my mind, with the insatiable appetite of a diseased imagination, feeding on itself, by conjuring up every phase of lunacy that I had either heard or read of. My father's bitter prejudices, his incessant likes and dislikes, the queer fancies he frequently indulged in, — were

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these indications of hereditary insanity? And then I ransacked my memory to see if I had been guilty of any eccentricities which might be looked upon as the forerunners of the dreaded malady. I carefully made a most critical examination of my disposition, and found it full of inconsistencies. I was a mixture of good and bad, of intense amiability and bear-like surliness, of determination and the weakest irresolution, of opinions most orthodox and most heterodox, of modesty and overweening vanity. Could such an incongruous mixture be aught but insanity? Like a man who has just seen a friend ill with the small-pox, and imagines that every little spot is the commencement of disease, so I fancied that everything I did which in the slightest degree departed from the rules of rigid conventionality was an indication that the curse of my family had marked me for its own.

It was months before I got over this revelation made to me by the injudicious housekeeper. During the time that I was at Oxford I led a very retired existence, and amused myself by painting and drawing when not reading for my examination. Not having been at a public school, I did not possess any of that social geniality which is often the result of public-school life. I felt shy among my brother undergraduates, and my shyness concealed itself 29 under a mantle of reserve and hauteur which did not tend to make me popular.

My father made me a good allowance, and I spent it on sculpture, pictures, rare books, and the like. Morbid self-consciousness, then very strong in me, made me imagine that every one I met was aware of the family secret; and consequently I was never so happy as when alone. But independent of this feeling, between

me and my brother undergraduates there was but little sympathy. I did not care for boating, cricket, rackets, billiards, or sports of any kind. The only physical recreation I allowed myself was riding, of which I was passionately fond. My temperament as regards the other sex was cold—a coldness arising from self-made theories and boyish cynicism, which caused me to ridicule the idea of love. Partly from extreme sensitiveness, and partly from principle—for I was always a sincere believer in religion—my mind recoiled with disgust from those frailties of the flesh which are supposed to be the chief snares of youth. You can therefore imagine that I was no boon companion at Abingdon or Woodstock.

After passing ‘Mods,’ I spent my time and money chiefly in lessons in painting from a well-known German artist, who was then staying at Oxford for the pur-

pose of copying some of the pictures at Blenheim. Under his tuition I improved so rapidly, and was so encouraged by him to follow art as my profession, that I was on the point of writing to my father to allow me to quit the University and turn artist, when the fearful news reached me of his suicide whilst in one of his fits of mental depression. It is needless for me to dwell upon this portion of my life, or to describe the shock it gave my nervous system. My father's death was reported in the county paper; and the writer kindly informed the public of the ravages that insanity had made in my family, dating from a far earlier period than that mentioned by the house-keeper. The paragraph went the round of all the county and many of the London papers.

With the exception of a few hundred pounds, I was left penniless. My mother's



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relations were the only ones who could have assisted me; but they had always looked coldly upon her alliance with my father, owing to the insanity in his family, and after her death all intercourse between the two families ceased. To this day I am ignorant of many of my maternal uncles and aunts. With my father's death any prospect of advancement that I might have had in the Church ceased, and to remain any longer at the University suited neither my altered circumstances nor my wishes. I determined to take the German painter's advice, and turn my attention to art. After some months spent in winding-up my poor father's affairs, and favoured with a few introductions, I started off for Rome. For two years I studied incessantly, and by dint of perseverance and natural talent, which made work a labour of love, managed to make such progress that my copies from

the old masters found ready purchasers, and enabled me to support myself by my brush, without encroaching upon my little patrimony. My two years of study in the Eternal City over, I returned to England, to begin the rough uphill life of an unknown artist.

I pass over my struggles and disappointments, for they are the common lot of all unknown men in a civilised country, where the supply of everything exceeds its demand. At last I was rewarded, and obtained a fair income by sketching for magazines and other periodical literature. I gradually became successful, but it was success of a kind which did not satisfy my ambition. I wished to be an artist, and not a draughtsman. It was you, kindest of friends, that bade me return to my neglected brush and palette, and leave the work that I had been engaged upon to men of third-rate talent and inferior education.

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You remember the picture I showed you when half completed, which I then intended calling 'A Greek Study,' of a woman leaning on a vase, and resting her head on her arms in an attitude of graceful coquetry? With that picture commences the history of my life. You may remember telling me, that if I could only render the expression of the face free from the insipidity common to all ideal faces, my picture would be a success. I had taken as a model for the pose of my figure Romney's portrait of Lady Hamilton, as it afforded me a good opportunity to display my talent in painting arms, hands, neck, and bust; for flesh-colouring, I always knew, was my forte. With the manner in which I had executed the figure of my portrait I was perfectly content. Its pose was graceful, and so true to life, that you said you expected to see its bust heave with respiration. I had resolved to

make it a success, and had put out all my strength in delineating with the most pre-Raphael-like minuteness every detail of my picture; but yet I was dissatisfied with its chief feature—the expression of the face. You said it was insipid, and advised me, instead of endeavouring to portray a creation of my imagination, to take some fair face as my model. I, however, was wedded to my ideal portrait. It was a face that had haunted my imagination when at Rome, and was one, to my mind, more beautiful than I had ever seen in life. I had sketched it frequently in crayon, but this was the first time I had ever attempted to depict it on canvas; and the more I painted, the farther its expression was removed from what I intended. It worried me.

I was then suffering from congestion of the liver, brought on from overwork; and the doctors recommended me to go to that

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fashionable watering-place Weedoncliffe, in the south of Devon, and take its efficacious and disagreeable waters. I resolved to follow their advice, and to finish my picture in the country, in the hopes that change of air might make me portray more to my satisfaction my ideal portrait.

The next week I was at Weedoncliffe.





## CHAPTER II.

### THE ORIGINAL.

' When in the chronicle of wasted time  
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,  
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme  
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights ;  
Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best  
Of hand, 'of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,  
I see their antique pen would have exprest  
E'en such a beauty as you master now.'



WEDONCLIFFE is one of those charming little seaside nooks which abound in England, and which for some three months in the year are marked by Fashion as an agreeable place of resort for her followers. The inhabitants, proud of their town having been selected as a fashionable watering-place, have done, and I believe are still doing, all in their

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power to gratify the wishes and tastes of their annual visitors, by rendering what was once beautiful from its natural simplicity stiff, cockneyfied, and would-be artistic.

The time that I had chosen for my visit was of course out of the season, and I could therefore enjoy walking about on the sands or on the esplanade without the infliction of meeting at every step over-dressed London ladies or patronising dandies, who always seem to me out of place wherever nature is predominant over art, as it is in the country.

I put up at the Trevennis hotel—the best and most comfortable in the town. The landlord had been butler to Sir John Trevennis (a local baronet of great wealth and ancient lineage who was then admiral of the fleet in the Mediterranean), and was a communicative and, in his own opinion, a most distinguished personage. He set up for a

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wit, and considered himself endowed with great powers of sarcasm. The chief topic of his conversation was modern society. He dearly loved to criticise men and manners; and often as I smoked my after-breakfast cigar in his little front garden facing the sea would he enter into conversation with me, and tell me stories about the chief families in the neighbourhood. My Devonshire name was familiar to him, and he treated me with distinction; otherwise I am sure nothing would have induced so grand a personage (for he was as grand as an ambassador and as respectable as a bishop) to talk so frequently with 'a artis.' He knew all the scandal of the neighbourhood, and amused me very much with his reminiscences of London life—from a domestic point of view *bien entendu*. 'You may be surprised, sir,' said he to me, 'at my knowledge of the world; but I ask you, who better able



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to judge of men and society than a man who sees without looking, hears without listening, and knows without inquiry—in other words, a well-bred servant? My knowledge of the world is derived entirely from observation when I was in society, though not of it, as butler to Sir John Trevennis. I intend to write a book on etiquette.'

One day this domestic mixture of Rochefoucauld and Chesterfield begged permission to come into my sitting-room to look at my picture, which he had heard from the chambermaid was 'so sweetly pretty.' I acceded to his request; but no sooner had his eyes met my canvas, than he gave a start of astonishment, and said,

'Why, that's her ladyship!'

'Pray, who is her ladyship?' said I.

'Lady Trevennis, the wife of my late master Sir John, to be sure. Well, it's very like, but you haven't caught her ex-

pression exactly, sir. You never told me you knew milady.'

'Nor do I; that face is painted by me simply out of my own head—a purely ideal study—and till now I never knew it resembled any one.'

In the outer world in which I lived in London I had often heard of the beautiful Lady Trevennis, as one of the leaders of *ton* in the fashionable world; but from never frequenting the haunts of society, I had never yet seen her. As is the case with most beauties, whose husbands are compelled by the exigencies of their professions to be absent from their side, scandal had been pretty rife with her name.

'And so your late master is the fortunate husband of the beautiful Lady Trevennis?' said I interrogatively, hoping, without asking any direct question, to obtain some information about my unknown model.

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‘Sir John is the husband of milady, though I don’t know about him being fortunate.’

‘Not fortunate? you ungallant man!’

‘Well, sir, you see, I don’t think Sir John and milady quite agree together like, which is as often the result of matrimony as babies is, in my opinion. Sir John is a man fond of study and quiet, whilst milady is always going into society, and, in fact, is only happy in the world. I am powerful fond of Sir John; and you won’t find a better man—though he is stern—or a more thorough gentleman, not if you were to search all over the three kingdoms. But her ladyship—’ And then he stopped.

‘Her ladyship you don’t like quite so well, I suppose?’ said I carelessly, brushing a speck of dust off the face of my ‘Greek Study.’

‘No, sir, I do not; and I always speak

my mind. They talk about May and December; and though Sir John is some thirty years older than milady, it isn't *he* that is the December: a really kinder and more genial man never lived.'

'O, then, Lady Trevennis is what you call a cold character?'

'Well, sir, the world calls her cold; but when I see a woman forgetful of her children in the dissipations of society, and of her husband in constant flirtation, I don't call her cold—I call her wicked.'

'Really I am afraid that my taste must be very perverted; for that face which I am now painting, when I can hit off the expression I wish to portray, is my idea of true beauty, and I don't think it looks at all like that of a wicked woman,' said I.

'No more it do, sir,' replied he; 'and if you see Lady Trevennis, whom your picture so wonderfully resembles (only, as you say,

it wants expression at present), I think you'll say a more beautiful face you never saw in your life. But it don't do to judge always by appearances in this world, you know, sir. Milady is an angel to look at—all grace and dignity; but strip her of her society manners, and, as the Frenchman says, you'll find the Tartar. Ah, it was a sorry moment for me and all the old servants, eight years ago, when Sir John brought to his old home his present wife; and for the matter of that, to him too, for he ain't a happy man.'

'Let me see,' said I reflectively; 'I think I heard once some rumour about his being separated from her. Is that so?'

'Certainly not, sir. People in society never separates—they only lives apart. It is only poor people as fears their wife's extravagance and tradesmen's bills that gets separated. Sir John is very fond of the sea,

and prefers his man-of-war to his—ha, ha! —woman-of-war; for milady have a temper when she's roused. And as for her ladyship, she hates the sea, and is very partial to the land—and its inhabitants. That's how it is, sir. The world talks, of course; but they ain't separated, for all what scandal asserts to the contrary.'

'Has Lady Trevennis any children?'

'Yes, sir, one boy aged six. He lives up here with his tutor when his mother is in town, and is as fine a lad as you'll find in the county. Milady ain't worthy of being his mother. Ah, who knows how long she *will* be his mother?' 2

'What, is Lady Trevennis delicate?' said I.

'Very,' replied he dryly, 'in her attentions upon our unworthy sex.'

'What do you mean?'

‘A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband,’ replied he.

‘Pray don’t speak in proverbs, Mr. Newton,’ said I.

‘Well, sir, as I said before, a virtuous woman is a crown to her husband; but then unfortunately it ain’t every husband that has the gratification of being present at his own coronation. I *have* heard of cases in the world where the matrimonial diadem has fallen into the hands of a usurper.’ This was said in his most would-be sarcastic manner.

‘I am afraid your zeal for Sir John Trevennis prejudices you against his lady, Mr. Newton. Scandal loves to sharpen its arrows upon the reputation of a beauty; but no one believes what “they say” who has had any experience of the malice of human nature. You see, I stand up for the character of my unknown model,’ replied I laughingly.

‘Very well, sir; but my knowledge of the world tells me that a pretty married woman can’t always be flirting and flirting without being caught at last. The pitcher was took many times to the well, but it broke at last. Flirtation is a very edged tool—egad, so edged, that I have seen it cut husband and wife asunder before now.’

‘I hope, Mr. Newton, you are not one of those men who are always jumping at disagreeable conclusions whenever any of the fair sex are mentioned,’ said I, beginning my painting.

‘A man can’t have been as long in society as I have, sir, without being a severe critic, and jumping at disagreeable conclusions, where women are concerned,’ said he dogmatically.

‘Well, my idea is, that women are as the men make them, and that there is no cause for the one sex to pretend to any



superiority over the other; for human nature even at its best is but a poor thing. By the way, is Lady Trevennis in London now, or the country?"

'In the country, sir. She never goes up to town till after Easter. She and her aunt Lady Ann Holcombe—a very severe lady, evangelical and homœopathic, who always lives with Lady Trevennis during the absence of Sir John—have just returned to Coombe Royal from Paris.'

'Coombe Royal?' said I.

'Yes, sir, that's Sir John's place—about three miles from here. You can just see the chimney-pots through the trees. But I must not take up any more of your time chatting here, sir. I beg to thank you for so kindly according me permission to see your *chef de over*, and I trust you will accord the same permission at some future time to Mrs. Newton.'

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This was said in his grandest and most overpowering manner.

‘O, certainly, whenever Mrs. Newton likes,’ replied I. ‘Good-morning.’

I mused over what this man had said, and over the curious coincidence that the face which I had imagined was a purely ideal study was, after all, only a portrait; and within three miles of me lived my unconscious model! I determined to take the first opportunity of comparing my ideal with the reality, and perhaps of borrowing a hint from the latter in the comparison.

My picture, thanks to the quiet and seclusion of Weedoncliffe, had made great progress; but yet, try as hard as I could, I was unable to catch the expression I wished the face to assume. Hour after hour did I spend in my studio, and hour after hour had I to undo the work which I had previously done, because dissatisfied with

my art. Now the face was too cold for the expression of the mouth, then too warm for the expression of the eyes; and so my brush was never idle; yet my picture was as far as ever from representing what my mind vividly conceived. The discrepancy between what my imagination created and what my art depicted was of course but the natural contrast which every young and inexperienced artist must expect. It, however, sadly worried me; for the colouring of my picture was, I flattered myself, almost equal to the Aurora of Guido, which I had taken as my example for complexion; and all I wanted was to catch the soul of the face—the expression—to make my painting a decided success.

The day after my conversation with Mr. Newton was Sunday—that day which you pious Protestants devote to the offices of religion, boredom, and gentle aperients.

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Like most places which have recently sprung up to gratify the caprice of fashion, Weedoncliffe is divided into an old and new town. In the old town are the parish church, with its ancient diamond-paned windows, mural tablets, damp discoloured walls, and high-backed exclusive-looking pews; the houses of the inferior tradesmen, and the cottages of the sailors. But all and everything that pretend to fashion or extra respectability are located in the new town. There are the sea-view villas, marine terraces, shops whose proprietors all came from London, the pump-room, the club (a bleak-looking room with an atlas and last week's papers), and above all, the little Gothic High Church, with its stained-glass windows, free seats, walls spotless as a whited sepulchre, elegant altar, and carved-oak pulpit.

Weedoncliffe had the reputation of being

‘a very High-Church place;’ and as three of its clergymen had married women of fortune, it was considered a very desirable opening for good-looking curates who might be anxious to make their temporary sojourn on earth as comfortable as well-dowered wives could make them.

I had intended going to the old parish church, which was frequented by a few Conservative tradesmen and the sailors, in preference to the brand-new little temple of Ritualism, and was putting on my gloves in the hall of the hotel when Mr. Newton came up.

‘Going to the new church, sir?’

‘No; I am thinking, on the contrary, of visiting the church in the old town.’

‘Well, for my part, sir, I’m no advocate for church-going; I don’t care to hear a parcel of men talk about what they don’t know, and preach what they don’t practise.

Besides, I don't like to see a man towering above my head, preaching *at* me for half an hour. And, after all, fashionable parsons are no better than other folk—simply clerical adventurers, who look upon the Church as a convenient stepping-stone to marrying well. They are rightly called Angler-Catholics; for they are always fishing for something; if it ain't for a wife, it's for something quite as frail and nearly as painted—a memorial-window or the like! I've no patience with them! But what I came to say was this, sir. I hear that Lady Trevennis will be at St. Allbosh—the new church—this morning; and I thought you might wish to see for yourself how like she is to your portrait.'

'O, thank you; then I shall certainly go to St. Allbosh. My curiosity is excited. Whereabouts does Lady Trevennis sit?'

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‘At the end of the church, just in front of the pulpit. You can’t mistake her seat, for it is the only pew in the church. Her ladyship told the rector, if she didn’t have a pew built as she wished, she would have service in her own private chapel at Coombe Royal. The rector, after a bit, consented; for he knew—worthy man!—that to get hold of Lady Trevennis meant money. So most Sunday mornings, when she is in the country, you may see her ladyship sweetly sleeping off the fatigue of the prayers during the sermon. The seat just behind milady’s pew is reserved for this hotel, and you had better go there, sir.’

I followed his advice, and five minutes afterwards I was seated behind the pew of the Trevennises, on the hard oak bench peculiar to Ritualistic chapels. The pew in front of me was perfectly empty, and I had ample opportunity of judging that Lady

Trevennis did not approve of being uncomfortable during the moments of divine service. The pew was carpeted and softly cushioned, and its floor strewn with the most springy of hassocks. On one of the latter was a foot-warmer.

The service began, the Absolution had been intoned, and we were singing the Psalms, when the pew-door opened, and a fair-haired boy entered with a tall old-maidish-looking lady. Following her was Lady Trevennis. I recognised her at once, from her marvellous likeness to my picture ; but what a caricature my portrait was, compared with the original !

There stood before me the very face that had so long haunted my imagination, wearing the expression I had in vain tried to portray !

I have by my side, whilst I am writing, a small miniature portrait of Lady Treven-



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nis. It shows me a fair oval face, pale and haughty ; the forehead low as Titian's Venus, and pure as marble ; the eyes deep blue, like an Italian lake in the sunshine, very large, and with a soft velvety expression ; the nose so slightly aquiline that I considered it Grecian ; a short, perhaps too full, upper lip, causing the mouth always to be slightly parted, and thus revealing between the rich luscious lips a set of even white teeth, which look like pearls in a coral setting. The rich dead-leaf-coloured hair is brushed slightly back from the forehead, and worn coiled up behind in folds, save two long curls which fall languidly down and kiss the firm white neck. But what this portrait before me does not depict, and what I cannot describe, is the constantly varying expression which, when Lady Trevennis was animated, illumined her face, as if the soul had chosen her features

for its shrine. When she smiled, it was a soft winsome smile, that, had she been an ugly, instead of a very pretty woman, would have at once disarmed all adverse criticism.

Unlike most classical faces—which, as a rule, make up for their want of expression by their impassive beauty and regularity of feature—the face of Lady Trevennis was essentially a *mobile* one. It reflected every phase of emotion. Its expression of pathos would have delighted Guido to portray in one of his Madonnas. When lit up by animation, the parted lips, the dimpled cheeks, the smiling eyes, gave her an expression of humour and voluptuous coquetry which Lely would have loved to invest his sirens with. And then when offended, the haughty air of that pale face, the cold steel-like look of the eyes, the pout of the lips, might have stood as a model for an irate Juno. Never have I seen a face that assumed such

various and distinct expressions, or one that was more plainly the index of the feelings within. Let me complete her portrait. Her figure was tall—just that proper height which combines grace and dignity; a certain majesty in the turn of her head, the fall of her shoulders, the breadth of the brow, invested her with an air which I have never seen equalled by any one.

When I first saw her in church, she was dressed in a short purple silk dress over a black satin petticoat—then fashionable in Paris, but almost unknown in England—a black velvet jacket trimmed with sable, and a purple bonnet unmistakably of Parisian architecture. She seemed very bored during the service, applied her scent-bottle frequently to her nose, took off her gloves and brightened her jewelled rings, and finally gracefully reclined her head against the pew's back, and—slept. I took this oppor-

tunity of sketching her face in my prayer-book.

At last the young curate had ceased his platitudes and his attitudes, and the service was over. I put my shilling in the red velvet bag and then walked out. At the door of the church stood a well-appointed landau with a tall powdered flunky at its side. The Trevennis party, the last of all the congregation, approached the carriage, the footman touched his hat and opened the door. I overheard the following conversation :

‘Helen, it is such a beautiful day, that I think I shall walk,’ said the elderly lady.

‘As you like, aunt,’ said Lady Trevennis. ‘Perhaps you had better take Reggie with you ; the walk will do him good. I shall drive, for I feel always so tired after church ; I think it is because the sermons go in at one ear and come out at the other that they affect the brain in their passage

—anyway they always give me a headache,’ laughed she as she entered the carriage.

‘I wish they would sink into your heart, Helen,’ said the elder lady gravely.

‘Sink?’ replied Lady Trevennis; ‘well, they are heavy enough. *Au revoir!*’ and her ladyship kissed her well-gloved hand to her aunt, and the next minute the carriage drove off.

As I entered my hotel, Mr. Newton was on the steps surveying with cynical eyes the congregation wending their way homewards.

Said he to me, ‘Well, sir, I hope you liked the service and the sermon.’

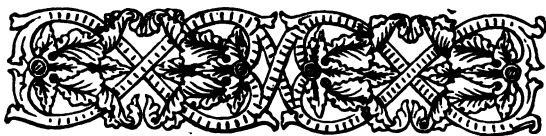
‘The service very much; but the sermon was, I must own, like nearly all sermons—a failure,’ replied I.

‘Yes, sir, I have no doubt about it. At this dull time of the year the St. Allbosh clergy don’t care to exert themselves; they are like our bathing-machines—only drawn

out in the season. You saw her ladyship, sir?"

I answered in the affirmative; and after making a few comparisons between Lady Trevennis and my picture, I retired to my room.





## CHAPTER III.

### FIRST ACQUAINTANCESHIP.

‘But as your charms insensibly  
To their perfection prest,  
So love as unperceived did fly,  
And center’d in my breast.’

**I** NOW set to work hard at my picture. The difficulty which before existed with regard to the expression of my study was removed by the sight of Lady Trevennis. I had now only to imitate, and not create; and with my mind vividly impressed with the face and features of my accidental model, that was no difficult task.

One morning, after I had been boxed up in my room for a week busily engaged in painting, I put on my hat, lit my cigar, and

resolved to take a long ramble in the country around Weedoncliffe and lunch at some little rural inn. It was a splendid day; the sky as blue as an Italian lake, and the sea as still as the sky. The Creator seemed to smile on the created; for all was bright and sunny. I wended my way along the cliffs, and then turned to the right as soon as I was out of the town and walked inland. My thoughts were naturally engrossed with my picture, and depression had given place to that feeling of sanguine excitement which most men experience when assured of success. And I felt success now awaited me. As, morning after morning, I gazed upon the face which my imagination had first depicted, and which had been so strangely realised by the presence of Lady Trevennis, and saw its features and colouring gradually assuming the expression I had been so long trying to attain, I was convinced that, what-



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ever the critics might say, it was a picture that would not disgrace the artist, and be the commencement of my fame.

I had walked for about a couple of hours without stopping, thinking over many things and arriving at various conclusions respecting what was in store for me in the future, when I heard behind me the roll of rapid wheels and the sharp click of horses' hoofs galloping over the hard ground at a rate which the sound, becoming at every second more distinct, told me was furious to a degree. I turned round, and some two hundred yards in front of me, saw a pair of brown horses with their heads tossing wildly tearing along the turnpike road as hard as they could lay their legs to the ground. They were harnessed to a low park-phaeton, and the reins were held by a lady whom I at once recognised as Lady Trevennis; but it was evident that neither

phaeton nor driver interfered in the slightest degree with their mad career. On they came, rapidly lessening at every stride the distance intervening between them and me, and scattering the red earth of the Devonshire road about in all directions as they sped infuriated and uncontrolled along the highway. Not a soul was near, except myself, to render any assistance to the unfortunate lady, who was doing all in her power to rein-in her 'wild untamed steeds,' but apparently in vain. I was still in the middle of the road, ignorant what course to adopt. Thirty yards now scarcely separated me from the phaeton, and I heard Lady Trevennis cry out:

'Get out of the way! My horses have run away!'

I resolved to render every assistance in my power; but how to carry my resolution into effect was the difficulty. Fortunately

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my very irresolution and ignorance effected my purpose. The horses appeared to be alarmed at my attitude in the middle of the road; for they slackened their pace, and seemed unwilling to run over the human post in front of them. They were now not ten yards from me, and I could see Lady Trevennis drop the reins with horror at the fate she evidently thought was in store for me. But there was no need for alarm. The horses, breathing hard and covered with thick soapy foam, came within a couple of yards of me, shied, and then swerved to the other side of the road, with the intention of passing me. Their swerving brought the phaeton close to my side, and like lightning I jumped upon its step, and the next moment was inside, with the fallen reins in my hands, and using all my strength to pull in the maddened brutes that had again galloped off at full speed. For about three

minutes I was fruitlessly engaged in trying to check their progress ; but at last my attempts were rewarded with success ; and after having my arms nearly pulled out of their sockets, and my gloves cut to strips, I was fortunate enough to get them under command, and with sobbing sides and bathed in foam they were redeeming the error of their ways by stepping together as quietly as any dealer could wish.

I turned towards Lady Trevennis, and bowing, said that I trusted she would forgive my intrusion ; but that, fearing her life was in danger, I did what I considered the best.

She was looking very pale ; but pallor only enhanced her exquisite beauty, and I noticed that her hands trembled visibly. She wore one of those black Tyrolese hats with a heron's feather curving its plumes over the crown, which subsequently became

so fashionable, and, alas, so common. A handsome sealskin jacket protected her from the keen March wind, and wrapped around her graceful form was a thick bearskin carriage-rug, in whose folds at her feet lay a shivering Italian greyhound.

‘You are most kind and brave to have assisted me in my distress, and no words of mine can thank you sufficiently; for had it not been for your courage, I fully believe I should have been killed—one so seldom sees anybody on these country roads,’ replied Lady Trevennis in a soft sweet voice, that caused a strange vibration to run through my frame.

‘And—pardon me for asking—was it not rather adventurous of you to travel out without a groom?’ I asked.

‘O,’ replied she, ‘my groom was thrown out of the phaeton whilst trying to seize the reins.’

‘Poor fellow! I think your horses are now perfectly quiet. Shall I drive back, and pick him up? He may be severely damaged.’

‘O, pray drive on,’ said she petulantly. ‘I daresay he will find his way back before the afternoon is over.’

It was evident that Lady Trevennis had no intention of putting herself out in the slightest degree for so insignificant a being as her servant.

‘You say drive on,’ replied I innocently. ‘Pray where to? I am a perfect stranger here.’

‘To Coombe Royal, please—that large red-brick house you see peeping out through the trees yonder. I hope,’ she said, turning to me and smiling, ‘you will excuse my asking you to drive me so far; but after this *contretemps*, I should be frightened to drive home myself.’

‘I can assure you that I have not the slightest idea of withdrawing my protecting hand till I have driven you safely to your destination. I believe that I have the pleasure of speaking to Lady Trevennis?’ said I inquiringly, and bowing.

‘Yes. You know me, then?’ said she.

‘I recognised your ladyship at once,’ replied I, ‘owing to a very strange coincidence.’

And then I told her about my picture, and the remarkable resemblance she bore to it.

‘How very odd! it sounds quite like a romance. But do you not think that you may have met me in society or elsewhere, and unconsciously have mistaken memory for imagination?’ asked Lady Trevennis.

‘I never go into society or frequent its haunts—’

‘You never go into society?’ replied she ‘astonished.

‘Never,’ answered L. ‘Society is woman’s profession, but man’s leisure. At present I cannot afford such leisure, for hard work is my society. But you were talking about my mistaking memory for imagination—’

‘Yes,’ she broke in; ‘I thought that you might have seen me, and unconsciously, you know, have transferred to your canvas my portrait, whilst imagining that you were creating an ideal one. It has occurred before with other artists, and I thought the same accident might have befallen you. Forgive me if I have for a moment doubted what you artists set great store by—your creative talent.’ And she smiled with that sunny smile of hers that was irresistible.

‘My “creative talent” pardons you,’ said I, laughing. ‘I must own that appearances are strongly against me; but notwithstanding their strength, till last Sunday I never



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saw you before. My picture is a purely ideal study, and one that I now value all the more from having seen its reality,' added I, bowing to my fair companion.

'Our anticipations are seldom realised,' said Lady Trevennis. 'You mean that the real (if, as you say, I *am* the real) does not equal your ideal?'

'On the contrary, the real is so perfect, that I feel flattered at my "creative talent" having been able to conceive its ideal.'

'You flatter me. You must have lived abroad; for flattery is the conversation of foreigners. But, by the way, is this picture of yours nearly finished?'

'Not yet. I hope to send it to the Academy next month to receive its fate of acceptance or rejection; but it will require a good three weeks' hard study before it is completed to my satisfaction. And after all,

the "hanging committee" may then reject it—ah, they're rightly called the hanging committee, for they keep many of us in suspense.'

'Really, if this picture is going to be so like me that it will be considered my portrait, I think I have a right to ask to see it. Nothing a woman is more sensitive about, you know, than her face,' said she archly.

'I will show it you with pleasure,' replied I. 'A fortnight hence it will be ready for your inspection, and I shall then be happy to submit it to you.'

'Many thanks.'

We drove on some hundred yards without saying anything to each other; and I felt that Lady Trevennis all the while was scanning me closely.

'Had you not told me you were an artist, I should have never taken you for one,' she said, resuming the conversation.

‘Am I to regard that as a compliment? I suppose your ladyship imagines all artists to wear velvet coats, wideawakes, long hair, and smoke short pipes till they are as stupid as their pictures. For my part, I never affect that sort of thing. Besides, at present I am only paying my attentions to Art, and so cannot afford to be careless of my appearance. When that discriminating goddess chooses to regard me as her accepted suitor, and my name is made, then I believe it will be *de rigueur* for me to appear so absorbed in my creations as to be unmindful of the requirements of civilisation.’

‘And when do you expect to be accepted by Art as her favoured suitor?’ said Lady Trevennis.

‘I know not. The engagement will, I fear, be a long one, and perhaps end, like most engagements, in mutual weariness of each other. However, I must look to my

picture to be a success ; and then, once successful, I shall ask the most fabulous sums for my pictures ;' and I laughed.

'If I were an artist,' said she, 'I think I should prefer fame to money.'

'O, but money is everything nowadays,' replied I. 'This is an eminently practical age, and we reduce honour, morality, religion—everything, in fact—to a marketable value. "Will it pay?" is the be-all and end-all of modern society. The ancients used to say that money was the root of all evil ; but we moderns call it the tree of life, beneath whose branches we all collect, with arms outstretched and mouth agape to gather the golden blossoms. Of course, therefore, I go with the times.'

'May I ask your name?'

I told her ; and was glad that it was familiar to her ; for she knew my uncle—a canon of Bristol, who held a very good liv-

ing in South Devon—and my father's first-cousin, a Sir Athelstan Disney; but as my father had quarrelled with all his family, I was quite a stranger to them and they to me; and the fact of my setting up as an artist did not certainly tend to make them wish to cultivate my acquaintance.

'Artists are very jealous of each other, are they not?' asked she.

'Not jealous, but impartial—they never speak well one of another,' replied I.

We had now arrived at some large iron gates, which at one time had adorned a Belgian convent on the Meuse, and which now served as the park-gates to Coombe Royal. A tall man, who looked like a promoted gamekeeper, came out of the neighbouring lodge and opened them, regarding me all the while with deferential astonishment. We entered a stately avenue, whose wide-spreading beech-trees extended their

naked branches to heaven, as if appealing for foliage; and as I drove along the well-kept road, the sharp click of the horses' hoofs awoke many a rabbit from his lair, and sent him scudding across the park. At the end of the avenue the Italian-statued terraces, rising one above the other, of Coombe Royal met my view; and the next minute the horses had entered the broad semicircular carriage-sweep in front of the house, and stopped before its splendid Elizabethan porch. The servants had heard our approach; the hall-doors were opened, and two footmen came out to receive the wrappers, &c., whilst a distinguished gentleman in black superintended their movements.

'George,' said Lady Trevennis to one of the footmen, in that brief tone of command which some fine ladies adopt when addressing their servants, 'send to Ray-

legh for Linton. He was thrown out of the phaeton; for the horses took fright at Clay Cross, and ran away with me. Had it not been for the courage of this gentleman'—and she turned her head towards me—'I should in all probability have met his fate.'

The servant trusted that her ladyship had suffered no harm, and then said, 'A foreign gentleman is waiting to see you, milady;' and he handed her a card.

Lady Trevennis read the name, and her face turned pale, and I saw a glitter in her eyes which spoke of controlled passion.

'Where is the gentleman?'

'In the library, milady.'

I got out of the carriage, and helped Lady Trevennis to alight. I was on the point of taking my departure, when she said:

'I hope you will stay to luncheon. I

cannot think of letting you return to Weedoncliffe without having shown you some hospitality. Pray excuse me a few minutes, I have to talk over some important matters with a gentleman who has just arrived from Paris. After luncheon I will show you the beauties of Coombe Royal; and as you are an artist, I am sure you will appreciate them.'

I bowed my thanks, and we entered the lofty hall. An elderly lady had just issued from one of its side-rooms.

'O, aunt,' said Lady Trevennis, 'pray come here for a moment.' And then I was introduced, due mention being made of my 'courageous act,' and left to the tender mercies of Lady Ann Holcombe, whilst Lady Trevennis entered a room at the end of the hall which I supposed was the library.

'I am sure,' said Lady Ann, as she led the way into a long magnificent drawing-



room, whose French windows looking on to the terraces offered a most picturesque view of the park, with Breckmere Forest in the distance—‘I am sure I am very grateful to you for having saved my niece’s life ; but youth is ever daring ;’ and she looked sentimentally at me. ‘I always feared those horses that Lady Trevennis has taken to driving ; but she thinks the Devonshire hills too much for her ponies. For my part, I would far rather that the hills were too much for the ponies than that the horses were too much for my niece. I always advised her to drive the ponies ; but she does not take advice,’ added the old lady, partly to herself and partly to me.

Lady Ann was a tall elegant-looking woman ; very kind and very fussy. She was dressed in mourning, and from her iron-gray hair to her little feet—which she was very proud of exhibiting on every occasion

—looked what she was, thoroughly the lady.

‘A venerable aspect !

Age sat with decent grace upon her visage,

And worthily became her silver locks.’

She evidently must have thought I was dissatisfied with the upholsterer who furnished Coombe Royal, for she kept making me try one chair after another before she was convinced that I was comfortable. We soon entered into conversation ; and from a peculiar phraseology she indulged in, I saw at once that she was what she would have called a ‘serious’ woman. She was one of those chatty agreeable sort of women with whom one feels perfectly at home after the briefest acquaintance. Like most agreeable people she was not very clever ; but at the same time she amused me considerably with her remarks.

‘A cousin of my brother-in-law, I think I have heard him say, married a Mr. Disney,

a clergyman, I believe, in Devonshire; a Miss—Miss—O, I forget her name,' said the old lady.

'I know very little of my family,' said I; 'we are rather famous for our feuds; and besides, so many of my name are clergymen, that I am afraid I cannot assist your memory, as I am utterly ignorant whom they married.'

'O, no matter;' and then flying off at a tangent, the old lady began: 'You are looking very pale, Mr. Disney; I fear that the excitement of this morning has been too much for you. May I give you a globule or two? A little nux and belladonna on occasions of any agitation are very beneficial to the system.'

'You are most kind; but I can assure you I am not labouring under any excitement; and I fear I have to own that I am no believer in homœopathy. "Man wants

but little here below," sings the poet; but I think that homœopathy supplies almost too little even to satisfy a poet,' replied I, smiling.

'Ah, I must try and remove all your prejudices,' said Lady Ann, rising and looking about the room for something.

'I am afraid you will find me very obstinate to convince. I look upon homœopathy as I do upon the Volunteers—an interesting plaything, but in times of danger perfectly useless. Can I assist you in your search?' asked I.

'Thanks. I am looking for a small pamphlet I wrote, entitled *Home and Homœopathy*, proving that that system of medicine is the greatest domestic blessing of the day. It must be in my room. Excuse me a few moments, will you? and I will at the same time get you a globule. Ah,' added she archly, as I opened the door for her, 'I shall

make you a convert to my opinions, *nous verrons !*' And I was left alone.

During Lady Ann's absence I amused myself by examining the objects of curiosity and of interest in the room. After I had cursorily inspected the different splendid collections of china scattered about the cabinets of buhl and marqueterie, the inlaid tables covered with rare books or gorgeous ferns streaming forth from pale Wedgwood vases, and the thousand-and-one nicknacks which always reveal the apartments sacred to woman, I turned my attention to a few paintings which adorned the walls. I had descended half-way down the room, and was regarding with admiration an exquisite Paul Veronese, when I overheard voices.

Facing me, to the right-hand side of the picture, was a door lit up with gold and mirrored panels, which led into an

adjacent room. It was from that room that the voices proceeded; and one of them I distinctly recognised as that of Lady Trevennis. I did not listen, but I could not prevent words falling on my ear. It was evident that an earnest and rather excited conversation was being carried on. In a distinctly foreign accent I heard the voice of a man say, 'Reveal all—Sir John—a thousand pounds—Napoleon—last time—honour;' and then the clear ringing voice of Lady Trevennis repeating with a force of sarcasm that I could hardly believe her sweet tones capable of, 'Honour, indeed!' I heard a man whisper 'Hush!' and then Lady Ann entered and found me gazing at the Paul Veronese.

'A thousand pardons for having left you so long alone; but I mislaid my little work. Pray accept this copy from me.'

I bowed my grateful thanks.

‘And now open your hand please, and let me give you a globule—there! Now, whatever is the matter with you, whether only slightly indisposed or seriously ill, that little sugar-comfit will restore you to perfect health. It is not much to swallow?’ asked Lady Ann triumphantly, as if she had already convinced me.

‘Are you referring to the globule, or to your ladyship’s account of its marvellous efficacy,’ said I, laughing and putting the sugar pin’s-head into my mouth.

‘O, you are such a quiz!’ said Lady Ann, in her most kittenish manner. Suddenly she became grave, and said, ‘I hope you will believe in homœopathy, because I always associate those who trust in it with awakened characters.’

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘With religious people, I mean,’ explained her ladyship.

‘Well, this is the day for startling theories, I confess; but I must own I never heard till now of people being regarded as religious because they believe in a globule, or looked upon as wicked for refusing a tincture. The only connection I can possibly see between the two subjects—religion and homœopathy—is, that we try to make both as palatable as possible, and perhaps think a little of either goes a long way.’

‘No; what I mean,’ continued Lady Ann, ‘is that religion is a test of faith, and so is homœopathy. And you will find that all people who are homœopaths are also those who are called Evangelical; in other words, those whose faith is everything. I trust, Mr. Disney, you belong to the sound party of the Church of England. Excuse my asking this question; but I take such an interest in young men.’

‘Your ladyship’s question is rather a



difficult one to answer. There was a time when the Church of England, like other Churches, professed a creed; but now it is only a school for controversy. When I know what the Church of England really believes, and what it commands its followers to obey, I shall be most happy to add my humble self to the number of its supporters.'

'And are you not a Churchman?' asked Lady Ann anxiously.

'I dislike to take lodgings in a falling house,' replied I sententially.

'O, I must give you some little books to read—will you read them? They are written by the Rev. Pugh Monger, of Dulcimer Chapel, Lowndes-square—such an eloquent young man; so sound, and O, so handsome!' murmured Lady Ann, who, like most old maids, was sentimentally inclined.

'Alas, not being a member of the fair sex, I fear that the handsomeness of Mr.

Monger would not be an object of attraction to me. I am not conventional, and my religion—very foolishly, perhaps—is not confined to what spiritual pastors say, think, or avoid.'

'Nor is the religion of any religious person,' replied Lady Ann rather indignantly.

'Not the religion of you ladies?' asked I, smiling.

'And why of us ladies especially?' said Lady Ann.

'I fear that in many cases the religion of women—I hope you will excuse my frankness—is purely emotional, and that their worship seldom gets beyond the worship of clergymen,' said I. 'All they like sheep have gone astray, and the sentimental parson is the bell-wether,' thought I; but I kept this thought to myself.

'Ah, you are mocking now,' replied Lady Ann, shaking her head gravely.

‘Well,’ laughed I, ‘I must own that I do not hold in high esteem men like Mr. Monger and his fellows. I cannot look upon them in any other light than as—not priests—but clerical lessees of fashionable tabernacles, who regard the Church as a speculation, and not, as it is, a mission. And, after all, it is not a very high vocation to utter, Sunday after Sunday, agreeable platitudes, for fear of wounding the feelings of one’s congregation and of losing—O immortal ambition of the descendants of the Apostles!—pew-rents.’

‘But must not clergymen live like other people?’ asked Lady Ann.

‘Live, of course, they must; but—excuse me—not like other people. Clergymen should live for others, not upon others; at present many of them try to combine the two modes not unsuccessfully.’

The mirrored door that I had before

noticed now opened, and Lady Trevennis issued from an adjoining room, a tall gentleman following her.

‘Aunt,’ said she, ‘let me introduce to you the Count de Vaudrien, who has come all the way from Paris to bring me news about Sir John.’

Lady Ann bowed, and hoped that the news was good.

‘Excellent,’ replied Lady Trevennis.

I was also introduced.

The Count was a tall thin man, with a bald conical-shaped head, Napoleonic nose, thick gray moustache and imperial. His eyes were black as sloes, and glittered at times with an expression of cunning and malice which was far from prepossessing one in his favour. He was dressed in black, with drab gaiters over his well-made boots. For a wonder, being a Frenchman, he wore no red ribbon or rosette in his button-hole.

The conversation now became general; but was speedily broken up by the departure of the Count, who regretted that he was unable to accept their ladyships' kind invitation to lunch, as he had to catch the half-past two train to London.

It appeared to me, though it might be only my imagination, that Lady Trevennis felt relieved at his departure. Shortly after the Count had taken his leave the door opened, and a servant in a drab coat, pink plush breeches, and his hair powdered as if he had determined that his mistress should not be taxed for nothing, announced that luncheon was ready.



## CHAPTER IV.

### AT COOMBE ROYAL.

'Who loves a mistress of such quality  
He soon hath found  
Affection's ground  
Beyond time, place, and all mortality.'

**H**ADY TREVENNIS was quite right in saying that Coombe Royal would please me. As a Devonshire man I had often heard of its magnificence, and above all of its collection of paintings and sculpture, which were among the finest in Great Britain; but it was situated in a part of the county remote from where we lived, and though, when a boy, I had intended paying it a visit, one thing or another had always prevented me.

It is situated on a hill, embosomed on

its north side in the beeches of Breckmere Forest; and on the south, east, and west, surrounded by its splendid park.

The mansion is one of the finest specimens which England possesses of the domestic architecture prevalent in the reign of Elizabeth. It is arranged in the form of a Roman **H**, with two magnificent fronts; and is built of stone and brick, happily unmutilated by the present barbarous taste, which covers with plaster many of our ancient buildings. An ornamented porch ascended by steps leads to the hall, on whose wainscot panels are upwards of eighty different shields with the family arms and intermarriages of the Trevennises up to the present time. The drawing-rooms and library look south, and command a most charming view of the well-laid-out terraces, with their Italian balustrades, their vases full of rare plants, and

their carefully kept flower-beds sloping down in three distinct gradations to the broad cedar-walk. Beyond the cedar-walk, and separated from it only by a sunk fence, is the park.

But the chief glories of Coombe Royal are its unrivalled collection of pictures and sculpture; and these Lady Trevennis, as soon as luncheon was over, took me to see. The picture-gallery runs along the whole length of the eastern front of the house, till it meets, at right-angles, the sculpture-gallery. Lady Trevennis pointed out to me the different pictures, modestly asking my opinion upon several, and whether they were placed in the best light.

It was indeed an imperial collection of paintings for a private gentleman to possess. In addition to the numerous family portraits—which are as uninteresting to a stranger as they are objects of interest and worship



to those of the family—there were gems from almost every artist of European repute. There were cherubs by Raphael, saints by Guido, heads by Da Vinci, peasant-boys by Murillo, a Madonna by Titian, a portrait of Eve by Michael Angelo, angels by Correggio, sirens dancing by Rubens, a Magdalene by Tintoretto, portraits by Velasquez and Vandyke, and innumerable other works of art by the first masters.

We passed into the sculpture-gallery; and there, in addition to a splendid series of modern urns carved out of different species of porphyry and granite, were statues in every variety of attitude. Those that particularly struck me, were an Alcibiades resting his foot on a helmet, a Bacchus in Parian marble, a statue of a recumbent woman with the drapery in the Etruscan style, and several terra-cotta monuments, red and black vases with reliefs, cinerary

urns in alabaster, and some curious lids of sarcophagi.

‘You indeed have a most princely collection, Lady Trevennis,’ said I, as we descended the broad dark oak staircase to join Lady Ann Holcombe on the terrace.

‘Yes; Sir Hubert, the father of Sir John, was ambassador for many years at various courts, and amused his leisure by collecting every work of art that money could purchase. We will walk, if you like, through the grounds?’

We descended the staircase, crossed the hall, and went down a flight of broad stone steps leading on to the terraces, their massive balustrades supporting vases of aloes and orange-trees. I am afraid that when the several beauties of Coombe Royal were pointed out to me—its magnificent conservatories, hot-houses, Chinese aviary, fantastic fountains, and variegated flower-beds

—my thoughts were far more occupied with thinking of the beautiful owner who walked by my side than with the possessions over which she was mistress.

I had seen that face so often in my dreams, had so often almost worshipped it as I saw its image become more and more defined on my canvas, that I could hardly believe that but three hours before Lady Trevennis and I were total strangers to each other. It appeared to me as if I had met an old friend, and one whom memory had never banished from my mind. And yet she knew almost nothing of me; and I little of her beyond what I had heard—that she was a fashionable London woman—one of the queens of fashion—without an idea beyond ‘society.’

Fortunately, in spite of my weakness of character, I am not a man easily prejudiced against those of whom I know nothing, and

seldom allow myself to be influenced by the opinions of others, unless such opinions agree with those deduced from my own observation. I judged people according to how I found them, and not as other persons wished me to find them. The scandal of the world made no impression on my mind, for I looked upon it as I did upon dancing—how could society get on without either?

I saw in Lady Trevennis only a woman spoiled and petted by the world—but no more spoiled or petted than other women would be who possessed her beauty or her fortune. In her manner, in her conversation, in her every action, she was essentially a woman of the world; but though most worldly (as was apparent at a glance), I felt that that pale haughty face and stately carriage carried with them a sense of self-respect which, in my own mind, at once gave the lie to the stories I had heard about her.

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I do not deny that from the first Lady Trevennis exercised a powerful influence over me. My life had been that of a recluse and a student; too poor to enter into society, too pure to care for the tinsel and false hilarity of the Bohemian world, Lady Trevennis was almost the first woman, and certainly the first lady, that I had ever spoken to who interested me. Motherless and sisterless, I had from my very youth upwards been deprived of that beneficial influence which, when rightly exercised, woman always possesses. Deprived of it, and ignorant of the many blessings such influence often confers, I, as you know, frequently sneered at the fair sex as so many powerless purposeless puppets on the stage of life. My cynicism was, however, but the result of ignorance, and only wanted the light of knowledge to dispel its black theories.

As we crossed the little rustic bridge which spanned the sunken ditch in front of the park, and wended our way to the lake through the deer-loved fern and golden broom which were scattered profusely about the thousand glens and hollows into which the park was broken, I felt that Lady Trevennis possessed for me an attraction to which I had hitherto been a stranger.

Pray do not misunderstand me. I knew perfectly well that she was a married woman, and therefore beyond the pale of my hopes—I believed *then* in the purity of English society. But the idea of love in the Frenchman's meaning of the word never once crossed my mind. Thus much, at least, my subsequent conduct proves. What I wished was, that I might one day be regarded by her as a friend. Nor did her conduct to me discourage this wish. She spoke to me very kindly, ap-

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peared to be interested in my profession, and hoped that if it were ever in her power to exercise any influence she might possess in my favour, I would not scruple to ask her to do so. There was no stiffness or Brummagem hauteur about her in talking to me, such as I had often seen in the cotton lords or shoddy patrons who gave me orders to paint copies from the great masters when I was at Rome. She was haughty certainly, but it was more manner than any affectation of superiority. Besides, though I was an artist, I belonged to a family equal in lineage to that of the Trevennises, and one whose name had been in the county for centuries. Lady Trevennis, by the way she addressed me, evidently looked upon me as one fully entitled to be treated with that consideration which good birth always commands in England, unless allied with the most flagrant misconduct;

and even then the addition of great wealth is sufficient to preserve position or social esteem.

Lady Trevennis was evidently amused at my unsophisticated nature, and at my downright observations about things in general; observations given with a force and vehemence unusual among conventional people. I felt that I possessed the charm of novelty for her, and several times my remarks caused her to break out into a soft musical laugh. I noticed too, and the thought gave me a thrill of pleasure, that she looked at me when she imagined I was not observing her, as if I were somebody worth the trouble of criticising. 'Ah,' thought I, 'how I wish that you and I might become friends, and that it might be in my power to prove my devotion to you!'

Often, as I bent over my canvas and saw my study growing more and more like that



form of beauty my imagination conceived as its ideal, had I thought that, should it ever be my lot to see in the flesh that same figure and those same features, how passionately I should adore them. How I should try to win her love, and by the power of my art make her as celebrated as Dante made Beatrice, as Petrarch made Laura, as Swift made Vanessa ! She should go down to posterity as the lovely wife of the great Harry Disney ; for, with the sanguineness of youth, I determined to be great. And now, walking by my side was the object of my enthusiastic dream, in the shape of a high-born fashionable lady, and the wife of a county potentate. The wife ! Well, since her marriage and her superior social position—even were she not married—forbid all ideas of love, let me seek for friendship.

Friendship between her and me ! What a glorious dream to encourage ! I was then

seven-and-twenty, and Lady Trevennis a year younger.

‘And are you intending to stay long at Weedoncliffe?’ said she to me as we crossed the Swiss bridge over the lake, and made our way to an ancient-looking tower now turned into a summer-house.

‘Till my picture is finished,’ replied I.

‘Could you not let me see it before a fortnight hence? I am thinking that if I liked it, and it is really a portrait of me, I would become its purchaser. But if I do this, I think I ought to sit to you. What do you say?’

‘That I feel highly flattered at your proposal. I think you will find that my picture resembles you very closely; but still I should be glad if you would consent to give me a few sittings,’ replied I.

‘Well, I will talk it over with Lady Ann; for we could drive into Weedoncliffe,

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say, twice a week. I suppose you have a kind of studio at Newton's hotel ?

I answered in the affirmative.

‘Ah, here is Lady Ann !’ said Lady Trevennis.

And there, toiling along the serpentine road of the park towards us, was that excellent lady. We had now arrived at the old tower, which was picturesquely covered with ivy, and supposed to be the ruin of a Norman castle that had once stood there. Lady Ann came up to us, and gazed sentimentally at the ruin.

‘Is not everything old beautiful, Mr. Disney ?’ said the ancient dame to me.

I looked into her face and, mentally differing from her, contented myself with some conventional reply.

We ascended the rock-hewn steps of the tower, and Lady Trevennis opening a low broad oaken door, we entered a large octa-

gonal room. The walls were panelled with oak, and both the roof and floor were of the same wood. The room was evidently intended for occupation, for it was luxuriously furnished with chairs and ottomans. The windows, of stained glass, depicted the crests and coats-of-arms of the Trevennis family.

Lady Trevennis threw open their painted panes, and revealed a splendid view of the northern portion of the park, with its wide-spreading trees, beneath whose branches the red and fallow deer were herding together in picturesque attitudes. In the distance was Breckmere Forest, and beyond rose the hills of Breckmere, their tops crested with numerous villas, for at their base on the other side lies the little town of Brecon-super-Mare, the rival of Weedoncliffe.

The two ladies sat down, and I leant against the wall gazing at the view before me—the park, the forest, and the emerald

uplands, all bathed in the dark red light of a March sunshine.

‘Helen, did you hear that Sir Kyder Minster is quite ruined?’ said Lady Ann to her niece.

‘Ruined!’ said Lady Trevennis. ‘Impossible! He came in for a large fortune only a fortnight ago; and I can assure you, from my private knowledge concerning some property he is about to purchase from Sir John, that he is very far from ruined. But who *could* have set such a report afloat?’

‘O, they say so,’ replied Lady Ann vaguely.

‘They! Pray who are “they”?’ asked Lady Trevennis contemptuously.

‘Generally the malicious people who know nothing, and talk about it,’ answered I.

My reply seemed to please Lady Trevennis; for she turned round to me, and smiled approvingly.

‘I was at Oxford with a man called Darrell Minster. I wonder whether he is a son of the gentleman you are talking about?’ asked I.

‘O, no,’ said Lady Ann. ‘Those are the Wiltshire Minsters; the sons are all called Darrell. Sir Kyder is no relation whatever to them. He is a very worthy man, but not, you know, of any family,’ she continued patronisingly. ‘He is the great carpet manufacturer at Exeter, and was mayor of that town when the Queen paid a visit to it, and of course was knighted; so, in his own estimation, and that of his family, he is a very great man, especially since he has been made colonel of a regiment of volunteers, and wears his uniform on every possible occasion.’

‘Really, quite one’s idea of a carpet-knight,’ said I, laughing.

Both the ladies smiled, and Lady Ann

vowed that I was a great quiz, and said she was quite afraid of me.

‘Pray, who lives there?’ I asked, pointing to a little gem of an Italian villa which glittered in the sunshine.

‘O, that is the house of Mr. Bohne, the great dramatist, you know,’ replied Lady Ann.

‘Yes, I suppose a man who borrows his plots from novels, and his dialogue from French plays, is nowadays called a great dramatist,’ answered I.

‘You are severe, Mr. Disney,’ said Lady Trevennis. ‘Do you know Mr. Bohne?’

‘I have met him now and then at the rooms of artists, but I do not know him.’

‘What a singular-looking man he is!’ said Lady Ann. ‘So very immense, and yet such a very small head—really not much bigger than a croquet-ball.’

‘One does not want a *very* large head

to fill it with the ideas of other people,' said I sententiously. 'But he is a man I know very little of; for he seldom extends his acquaintanceship to the unsuccessful.'

'And do you call yourself unsuccessful?' asked Lady Trevennis, looking at me rather kindly, I thought.

'How can I, when your ladyship permits me to immortalise myself by painting your portrait?' replied I, sitting down beside her.

The conversation now turned upon my picture; and it was agreed that on the following Tuesday week the ladies should drive over to Weedoncliffe, and see my painting. After we had remained in the tower for about half an hour or so, and had satiated our gaze with the view before us, we retraced our steps to the Hall. As we were crossing the park, a little boy on a Shet-



land pony scampered up to us, flushed with health and out of breath.

‘O, aunty!’ exclaimed he, ‘I’ve had such a splendid ride to Ashleigh Tor and back!’

He was a fair-haired, soft-cheeked lad, with the splendid eyes of his mother. With the charming frankness and simplicity of youth, he came up and shook hands with me. I was much struck by the fact that Lady Trevennis seemed to take hardly any notice of him; and the boy himself, when he approached his mother, was at once subdued, as if he felt ill at ease in her presence.

‘Well, Reggie, are you hungry?’ said the kindly voice of Lady Ann; and at once the lad was at her side, and she walked along with him, leaving Lady Trevennis and me *tête-à-tête*.

‘I really hardly know what to do with my son,’ said she to me. ‘He is getting

quite unmanageable at home ; and his tutor, who was the curate here, has just got a Crown living.'

'He is almost too young to have a tutor,' replied I ; 'a governess would be, I should think, more suitable for him.'

'O, I dislike governesses ; they are, as a rule, a most unsatisfactory compromise between the kitchen and the drawing-room. It is the fashion to cant about the poor governess, and to pity her condition, and to grow sentimental over the domestic wrongs she suffers ; but there are two sides to every question. If you knew the kind of people who frequently set up as governesses, and come to ladies to offer their services, I am sure you would pity the mistresses more than the governesses. I have had young women calling upon me who have advertised that they possess every qualification under the sun, and hardly one

could talk English as well as my maid ; and as for their manners and accomplishments, the less said about them the better. Giggling, over-dressed, under-bred women ; I have no patience with them ! Of course there are some governesses, and especially those of French and Italian birth, who are really ladies and well-accomplished women ; but they are snatched up at once ; and the last time I was looking out for one for Reggie, I was quite unable to suit myself. The education of children is a very difficult matter.'

'It is. What with governesses who cannot teach, proprietary schools which only profit their masters, and public schools which take eight years to teach a boy nothing, education becomes most perplexing,' said I.

'Were you at a public school ?'

'No ; I was educated at home by my father, who had a very strong antipathy to

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public schools; and I must own I entertain some of his dislike myself. I generally found that the men who succeeded best at Oxford were those educated under private auspices. Of course, if vulgar people look upon a public school as a kind of cradle of society, and think it worth while to spend 300*l.* a year in order that their boy may know a lord, or be in the same class with a duke, that is their affair. For my part, I think the game not worth the candle; for even if schoolboy friendship continues at Oxford, it seldom survives after the university. And if you regard public schools from an intellectual point of view, a smattering of Latin and Greek, and a little mathematics—with no knowledge of history, geography, French, English literature, and the like—are a poor result for some eight years' strain on the purse of paterfamilias.'

'But I think it is a good thing for a

boy to have been at a public school ; it helps him in after-life. Should Reggie stand for this division of the county, as so many of his name have done before him,' said she slowly, 'it will be a recommendation to his constituents that he has been, say, at Eton and Christ-church.'

'O, that is very probable,' replied I. 'If you look upon education merely in a social point of view, then I grant you that a public-school boy possesses advantages from which one who has been educated elsewhere is exempt. But I was looking upon education in a rather higher light,' added I, smiling. 'My idea on the subject is, that education should not consist—as it so often does in our schools—in cramming a clever boy and neglecting a stupid one; but in teaching how to put knowledge to a useful purpose. And then, why should the greater part of a boy's youth be spent

in learning subjects which in after-life are no use to him? Why teach a boy who is not intended for the university, but who is going into his father's business as a soap-boiler or sugar-baker, nothing but classics and mathematics at school, when French and German, geography and arithmetic, would be far more useful to him?

'O, but then a classical education is so very desirable,' interrupted Lady Trevennis.

'Granted; but then a boy can hardly be said to have received a classical education when he quits school at sixteen for his father's office; all he knows is a little smattering of Latin and Greek, which, at the end of three years, he will quite forget. Of course, for your son it is very desirable that he should have a classical education, so as to pass with credit at the university, and be able to fulfil his duties as a country magistrate and a probable member of Par-

liament. Therefore, if you were to send him to Eton or Harrow, the course of education there would not be out of place for him; only I think you would find, when he goes up to the university, that—unless he is very clever, and likely to reflect credit on his school (when, of course, he will be pushed on ahead)—he has been a very long time acquiring the small amount of information he would then possess.'

'Then you are in favour of private education, in opposition to a public-school one?' asked Lady Trevennis.

'I certainly think a boy learns far more at home with his tutor than he does at a school,' answered I.

'O, but I think public-school life makes a man of a boy, and gives a tone to his character,' said Lady Trevennis.

'It may, and it may just do the contrary,' said I. 'We see in every public

school boys who are keenly ambitious of taking high honours in the cricket-field, or who pride themselves upon their rowing or athletic sports; and so, because some healthy-minded vigorous boys give a name to their school for pluck and exercise, we are quite satisfied that public-school life is essentially a manly and healthy existence. But we forget that a school is a very big place, and we forget the numerous boys who take no part in outdoor sports, but who— young, pliant, and with principles unformed, and with little or no restraint upon themselves, and out of school hardly at all looked after—soon get into irretrievable mischief. Young plants require a deal of nurture, and schools are far from being, in my opinion, a safe nursery.'

'I am looking out for a tutor now at this very moment. Can you assist me?' said Lady Trevennis.



‘I should hardly think my assistance necessary, when so many men are anxious for such an appointment; but I will bear your wish in mind,’ replied I.

We had now arrived at the house, and after the ladies had again promised to pay my studio a visit, I took my departure; Lady Trevennis, however, insisting on her coachman driving me back to Weedon-cliffe.

As I drove back to the hotel, my thoughts were full of Lady Trevennis. Her attentive kindness had made almost as much impression on my mind as her winning beauty; and I began to torture myself by all kinds of reflections upon my behaviour towards her, and whether *I* had so acted as to leave also an agreeable impression upon her.

Already I was yearning for the time when we should meet again, and everything

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connected with my future, which was not associated with her, looked cold and cheerless. 'Is this something more than friendship that I feel?' thought I. O, Plato!





## CHAPTER V.

LORD EDGEWARE.

‘And he became  
The slave of low desires;  
A man who, without self-control,  
Would seek what the degraded soul  
Unworthily admires.’



N my return to Weedoncliffe I saw a young man lounging against the hall-door of my hotel smoking a cigar. He had a black deer-stalker's hat on his head, and was dressed in a brown velveteen coat with monogram buttons, and knickerbockers with dark blue stockings. He was tall, and what is termed ‘aristocratic-looking’ — that is to say, his complexion was white, his hair light and curly,

and which, he said (and perhaps not untruly), were unfit for a Christian to drink. The fire was with difficulty put out; but he was pardoned, though reprimanded. We are given as a nation to pardon our privileged classes. Faults in a peer are flagrant vices in a commoner.

Lord Edgeware committed one act, however, which was not pardoned, and which caused him to quit the university in the same honourable manner as he had left Eton. It was found that his valet was a London Aspasia in disguise, and he hastily fled from Oxford. His father, thinking that the discipline in the army might be a beneficial antidote to his self-indulgent habits, now obtained him a commission in a crack hussar regiment.

Shortly after he was gazetted, his regiment was ordered to India, and thither his lordship accompanied it; but the mutiny

breaking out, Lord Kilburn obtained leave of absence, and was distinguished for having made the quickest passage home during the terrible Sepoy war of any officer in the British army. On his coming of age, a quarrel ensued between him and his father respecting—that fruitful source of all quarrels—money matters, and Lord Kilburn quitted the parental roof vowing eternal hostility to his sire.

He had, however, no lack of roofs to shelter him under. Every mother in society was only too delighted to receive him, in order that one of her dear girls might have the chance of becoming the future Countess of Edgeware. The world—that collection of charming persons who never do anything for nothing—took his part, and extenuated the faults of the vicious ill-conducted young man. We do not require much pressing to pardon a title and 100,000*l.* a year. Lord

Kilburn was called only a 'little wild,' 'rather fast, you know,' &c.; and when his criminal intrigues were mentioned, all blame was taken entirely off his shoulders, and it was 'the fault of the women.'

No one dared to call him what he was — a base treacherous villain, who was as faithless a friend as he was lover. Had he been the son of a nobody, the very mention of his name would have been a disgrace to ears polite. As it was, however, few names fell more sweetly on Belgravian, Tyburnian, and South Kensingtonian mothers' ears than that of Lord Kilburn, when he was ushered into their spotless drawing-rooms. Who can help admiring the sacred charms of maternal affection when we see mothers doing all in their power to link their daughters in the galling bonds of matrimony with men whose character they despise, whose morals they loathe, but whose

birth and fortune they worship? If that be maternal affection, give me the maternal instinct of an animal instead—it is far more human.

But in vain materfamilias spread the charms of her lovely daughters before the future ornament of our British peerage. Lord Kilburn was impregnable; and the Belgravian motherhood feared that he was not indeed a marrying man. But *nil desperandum* was their motto; and though their efforts required the patience of Job and the perseverance of a German, they would be as nothing, provided so splendid a fish as Lord Kilburn were only hooked.

Like hounds after a fox (and though Lord Kilburn was a man of the most meagre intellect, he had a kind of low fox-like cunning which was a very good substitute for brains), they did all in their power to run him to earth. At Cowes, at Naples, at

Brighton, at Biarritz, in London or Paris, in Vienna or St. Petersburg, in Scotland or Norway, in Switzerland or the Pyrenees, in fact wherever there was a town or country which his lordship delighted to visit, for the time there followed after him certain anxious, eager, solicitous mothers of England, with their tempting wares in the shape of their daughters.

‘Begad!’ said his lordship, ‘if this kind of thing goes on now whilst my fortune is only prospective, what will it be when the governor croaks? and that can’t be long, for he had his second seizure yesterday, I hear, and is as shaky as the deuce. What devilish hard work, though, it must be to be an active woman of the world, with a small rent-roll and a large supply of yearlings! The manner in which they follow me about—’gad, it *must* be hard work! I wish the doose they’d drop it, though; persecution is



nothing to it. But I fear I'll have to submit quietly to it; for you might just as well have asked Assheton Smith to give up field-sports, as to ask a keen ambitious English mother to abandon husband-hunting.'

It was at Rome that I first saw this *petit crevé* of our peerage. The Earl of Edgeware had died some two months ago at Nice, and his son was now the earl. I have said society was at his feet; and only those who know what Roman society is can fully appreciate the meaning of the phrase. In other words, the most immoral society of the most immoral capital in Europe flattered and fêted him to his fullest bent.

I made his acquaintance purely accidentally, for I never entered society. One day I was painting a copy of the Venus in the Palazzo Borghese at Rome for a rich stockbroker, who had offered me one hundred guineas for the commission. You know that

splendid picture, with its recumbent nude figure, so graceful in the exquisite symmetry of its limbs, and in the voluptuous expression of their rounded outlines, with those dreamy eyes dwelling, as if with pride, on her gorgeous perfections; that low Grecian brow; that ideal nose one worships—alas! only on canvas or in marble, for Nature owns it not; those parted ruby lips; that magnificent throat, white as alabaster and swan-like in its suppleness; that wavelet bosom; those amorous arms; those Vandyke hands? You know that picture—what artist does not? I had copied it as faithfully as I was able, and a small admiring crowd was around my easel.

On my departure, after my day's work, a gentleman came up to me and begged to know my address. I told it him, and he gave me his card, saying that he wished me to paint the portrait of a lady, whom

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he would bring with him, if I would consent to undertake the task. I consented, and appointed the next day for him to call upon me. On his card was the name of the Earl of Edgeware.

It was the first time that I had come in actual contact with *Il Principe Inglese*, as they called him in Rome, but his name was far from being unfamiliar to me. I had heard in the rooms of artists stories of his fabulous wealth, and of the homage paid to him by society. His previous history, too, was freely discussed; and from the remarks I heard, it was plain that, though none respected him, almost all envied him. 'Ah, if I only had his fortune!' was always the chorus that followed such conversations; and of all the artists who abused him, there was hardly one who would not have been raised to the seventh heaven of happiness, had he obtained an order from the Earl to

paint something for him. I frankly own that I was pleased with the offer he made me; for I knew that, for what his lordship wanted, he invariably paid handsomely; and my funds, never very flourishing, were then at a low ebb. I awaited therefore his visit with some anxiety.

The next day, at the time appointed, my porter, with numerous profound 'reverences of ceremony,' ushered in Lord Edgeware, and a lady dressed in black velvet (for it was winter), and closely veiled. Nobody could be more courteous and more the man of the world than his lordship when he chose; and on this occasion he was more than usually so. He said he had been much struck by my copy of the Venus, and wished to ascertain if I thought myself capable of painting a portrait. I expressed myself perfectly capable. He was delighted to hear it, and said that the lady would

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come with him three times a week to sit for her portrait; and that if the picture pleased him, he would give me two hundred guineas, but that if he were displeased with my art, I should have only one hundred.

I consented, and begged the lady to remove her veil, in order that I might make my sketch of her face, and I would then, if convenient to her, fix the days for her to attend in my studio. She at once complied with my wish, and said that she was very desirous of having her portrait speedily finished, and that for the next month she would place herself entirely at my disposal, in order to facilitate its progress.

She was a tall handsome woman, with a figure though slightly inclined to *embon-point*, yet perfect in its exquisite symmetry. Her eyes were of that liquid hazel rarely seen anywhere but south of the Alps and Pyrenees; and, together with the almond-

shaped nostrils and the full bow-like lips, spoke of that passionate animalism peculiar to those of the *beau sexe* generally who live west of the Apennines. I recognised her at once as the Marchesa del Monlini, the wife of one of the oldest and wealthiest of the Roman nobility.

With that charming belief in the sanctity of domestic bliss so essentially characteristic of Italian manners and customs, the Marchesa indulged in that graceful and delicate appendage to conjugal felicity, a *cicis-beo*. At the time when I first made the acquaintance of Lord Edgewart he occupied that left-handed marital position; and it was no doubt for his lordship (who was the most constant and ardent of lovers for about five weeks) that I was desired to paint her portrait. The supply in the Italian artist market slightly exceeding its demand, caused me then to have very little work on hand;

and the result was, that every day for two hours the Marchesa, accompanied by Lord Edgware, came to my studio to give me 'sittings.' Her portrait progressed so entirely to their satisfaction, that his lordship was good enough to say that I painted her face almost as well as she painted it herself. It was during these sittings that I had plenty of opportunity for judging what kind of man Lord Edgware was.

Like many men of meagre and superficial intellect, he estimated all men and all things by his own standard. He measured everybody's corn by his own bushel, as the proverb says. Because he believed in nothing that was true, pure, or holy, he came to the conclusion that truth, purity, and religion were virtues that never existed, but merely masks put on to serve a certain purpose. A favourite phrase of his was, that 'everything is humbug.' When contra-

dicted on this point, he said that he had seen more of life than fell to the lot of most men—been more behind the scenes of society—and therefore judged of human nature and of manners, not as people imagined them or wished them to appear, but as they really existed.

He had listened to bishops preaching, with all the authority of episcopal power, before crowded, respectful, and attentive audiences of the awful sin of leading a life of luxury and ease, of the folly of ambition, and of the utter vanity of the things of this world; and then he had seen them at their homes angry with their butler because the champagne was not sufficiently iced, or the claret not sufficiently warmed; had seen them scheming as eagerly as any Belgravian mother for good alliances for their daughters and good appointments for their sons; and had laughed with the Prime Minister



at their unctuous letters for promotion. Descendants of the apostles they were indeed, in one sense, for they were truly 'fishers of men.'

On his privileged seat on the bench, he had heard judges, with all the solemnity and austerity of their grave office, deliver to some poor devil of a prisoner, whose only home since his illegitimate birth had been the prison cells, a highly moral sermon in the choicest rhetoric, whilst sentencing him to penal servitude; and then he had gone and dined with one of these very same judges, and found perhaps his table presided over by a mistress instead of a wife, and his daughters forced by their father's conduct to quit their home.

He had heard clergymen preach of the contamination that must ensue from society with sinners, and how such people were to be shunned and avoided, and made to

feel their wretched condition; and then he had seen these same clergymen fall down before him, fawn upon him, and extol the virtues which he never possessed, and palliate his vices which were as black as pitch that defileth a man, and as numberless as the sands of the sea—for what? For a good living.

He owned a newspaper and a weekly review; and many a sarcastic shaft he let fly at the ‘purity of the press.’ ‘Gad,’ he used to say, with his detestable grin, ‘there is not a literary man—and when I say a literary man, I mean a literary man, and not a man of letters, that’s something quite different—there is not a literary man, I say, that ever lived who wouldn’t sell his opinions and every dam thing for a good Government appointment. I know what purity of the press means, and I know what criticism means, and I know what writing to

order means too.' Then he would put on his cruel malignant leer, that made me wonder more and more how any one could call him handsome.

He was cynical about the morality of fashionable physicians, about the sense of principle in barristers; and in short, if we were to believe this graceless peer, there was nobody who did not pretend to be what he was not, and nothing that was not 'organised hypocrisy' and utter sham. Nor did he take the slightest pains to conceal his opinions; on the contrary, he flaunted them in the face of everybody, no matter who his listeners were. I had not known him for two hours before he made me the confidant of his views; and as each day he accompanied the Marchesa, and during her sittings talked about everything in the freest manner, I felt at the end of three weeks that I knew pretty well about my

lord—in fact, more than I cared. His society was certainly not improving.

One evening I was seated at my open window, enjoying the fresh night-air that circulated through my close cramped little studio, when I heard my door quietly open, and a lady entered masked, and with a long waterproof cloak completely enveloping her figure. She shut the door, crossed my room, closed the window, and pulled down its coarse red blind. I made a slight gesture of astonishment, and was about to speak, for I recognised at once that my fair intruder was the Marchesa; but she imperiously bade me be silent.

I am no admirer of dark beauties; but the appearance of the Marchesa that evening almost made me change my opinion. Beautiful indeed she looked, with her silky blue-black hair dressed *à la Grecque*, and lit up with a comb whose ornamented top

blazed with diamonds; with her pale expressive face, with its eyes gleaming like her brilliants; with her haughty Juno-like neck, and vast though magnificently-proportioned bust; and with her royal Cleopatra-like figure, whose flowing lines and serpentine grace made artists and sculptors involuntarily ejaculate, 'What a model!' Her beauty too was heightened by all the fictitious aids that a splendid toilette could offer; for she had come straight to my lodging from a ball that the Princess Catalini was giving to some of the residents and visitors at Rome.

Need I tell you the cause of her intrusion? I think not. It was the old, old story, that society never ceases to repeat, of woman, bereft of principle and unsexed by contact with the world's idea of virtue, throwing off all control where the passions are concerned. The school in which the

Marchesa del Monlini had been brought up was hardly the one best calculated to inspire either purity or true affection; but till that evening I never knew how low a woman of birth, and of that external refinement which the usages of good society invariably teach, could stoop to gratify a passing fancy. Passionately, and with an eloquence that showed she was no novice in the matter, she offered me her love, her fortune—everything, if I would but share it.

Ah, if I had been like most men!—like many of the men I had met at Oxford, or of the artists who surrounded me, for instance—who, looking upon life as through a prism of vicious moments, lived only for what they called love, and passed their time in intrigues and boasting of conquests they never made,—if I had been as one of these, what an opportunity was now offered me!

But happily, if I could say no more, I could at least say with Pope, that 'virtue alone is happiness below;' and most scrupulously had I adhered to his motto. I was about coldly and haughtily to state that I was unable to reciprocate her affection or her peculiar views of morality, when the Marchesa interrupted me by a look of terror, and exclaimed, 'Lord Edgeware is talking to your porter downstairs!'

It was true. Distinctly I heard Lord Edgeware ask the servant 'whether Mr. Disney was in his studio.' The porter replied in the affirmative; and the next moment I heard his lordship's footsteps ascending the creaky wooden staircase that led to my room.

'Where *shall* I fly to?' asked the Marchesa of me in tones of despair and irritation.

My apartments were all *en suite*, and

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folding-doors separated my studio from my dressing-room. The Marchesa, in her hasty examination of my room for some place of security, saw the folding-doors, which were then closed, and demanded passionately where they led to. I answered her question; and the next moment her hand was on the tarnished brass handle of the door, and in another second she would have been hidden. But before that happy consummation was attained, Lord Edgeware had softly knocked at my door, opened it without waiting for my permission to enter, and—the Marchesa was discovered! He shut the door after him very quietly, and then calmly gazed at us. I drew myself up haughtily; for appearances were, I felt, suspiciously against me, and it had been contrary to my course of conduct ever to give rise to such suspicions. Lord Edgeware turned in the direction of the Marchesa, who leant pale



and trembling, looking more handsome in her distress than I had ever seen her, and said, in his most sarcastic voice,

‘There are some women whose virtue is their only beauty, and others whose beauty is their only virtue; your ladyship, I know, belongs to the latter class. Permit me, however, to protect that beauty by escorting you to your brougham, which I found standing at the top of this street.’

He assisted her in putting on her waterproof cloak, and offered her his arm without saying another word. She obeyed him implicitly; for I had heard that the woman who became his mistress became also his slave. What peculiar power of control he exercised over his fair adorers, I know not; but certainly, in this instance, the proud-looking woman was as meek as a lamb, or as a curate in the presence of his bishop, and took his arm and left my

room without vouchsafing me a word or a glance.

An hour afterwards Lord Edgeware returned. He was very pale, and the expression of his mouth and eyes gave full evidence of suppressed rage. Without a word of apology for his intrusion, he sat down in front of me, and poured forth a torrent of abuse in terms of the plainest and coarsest invective. He was under the impression that I was endeavouring to oust him from his position as the favoured lover of the Marchesa, and that it was I who had appointed my rooms for an assignation.

‘But I tell you what,’ said he, in concluding his Billingsgate diatribe, ‘I have no intention of having for my rival an infernal oil and colour man’ (this was a graceful allusion to my profession). ‘If you choose to poach upon my preserves, begad,

you shall suffer for it!' And he leant back, evidently awaiting my reply.

I had let him exhaust himself in his passion without making a single interruption; for my knowledge of human nature made me perfectly aware that by keeping cool I was only heaping coals of fire upon his head.

I answered calmly, 'I will not condescend, Lord Edgeware, after your insulting behaviour, to say a single word explanatory of the visit of the Marchesa del Monlini. Nor should I have, under any circumstances, sought to exculpate myself by offering you a full explanation (for that I could only do by compromising a lady); but, after your present conduct, I decline to have any farther intercourse, professional or otherwise, with one whom I consider a disgrace to his order, and a foul libel on the name of gentleman. I beg of

you, therefore, to withdraw your objectionable presence from my society. And'—for he was about to speak—'let me tell you, that if you dare to say another word of abuse to me, I will kick you downstairs, and let all Rome know of the fact to-morrow.'

'There is only one course open for us after this,' said he hoarsely, and glaring at me savagely.

'You mean a duel, I presume?'

'Yes; and by —, I'll have your life, you infernal —'

'No abuse, I beg; you know my conditions about that. Duels are certainly out of vogue amongst Englishmen; and, in my opinion, are foolish and wicked proceedings—'

'O, none of your psalm-singing cant here,' interrupted my Lord; 'if you're a funk, say so.'

‘I am not a funk, as your Lordship terms it; and to prove it to you, I will meet you when and where you please.’

‘You will, will you?’ said Lord Edgeware, rising up from his seat, and a smile of bitter revenge lighting up his face. ‘Well, then, I have nothing more to say or do—till we meet.’ And he laid a peculiar emphasis on the last sentence. The next moment he was gone.

The following afternoon we met in an open space behind the Coliseum. Lord Edgeware was accompanied by a Colonel Arlington, and I by Fritz Hoffheim—a German artist, who lived on the flat above me, and with whom I was acquainted. Our weapons were pistols; but as mine were an old-fashioned, ill-conditioned kind of arms, Colonel Arlington kindly offered to lend me a pair, which I accepted. Our seconds now arranged us in our places, and

it was agreed that Colonel Arlington should give the signal.

‘After the word *three*, you fire,’ he cried addressing us. ‘Are you ready?’

‘Yes,’ we both replied.

‘One, two—’

No sooner had the word *two* been said than Lord Edgeware fired; and the ball grazed the calf of my leg—merely stinging me, but otherwise doing me no harm. I returned his fire instantaneously, and my ball entering his thigh, he fell heavily to the ground. Colonel Arlington immediately came up, and apologised for his principal firing before the signal had been given, saying, that it was ‘the result of an accident.’ I bowed coldly, and made some conventional remark; for I wished to have no dispute about the matter—though I heard that it was an accident that *usually* attended his lordship’s combats of honour.

Lord Edgeware's surgeon, who was on the field, pronounced his wound not to be dangerous; and after I had seen his lordship carried to his carriage, I left the ground. He kept his bed for a month, and at the end of that time was as much about as ever. A few days after the duel, I received a letter from the Marchesa, from Naples, enclosing me a cheque, and asking me to send her picture to the Hotel Vittoria. It contained not a word about her visit or its results, but was simply a formal business letter. I complied with her wishes.

One evening, about a fortnight after the recovery of Lord Edgeware, as I was returning from that isolated, soul-degrading quarter of Rome called the Ghetto, where I had been buying one or two antiques, and was walking slowly down the Piazza di Tortogia, I suddenly felt my neck garrotted,

and a stiletto penetrate my left shoulder. Stung with pain, and using all my strength, I struggled to turn round upon my enemy, and at last succeeded in reversing our positions; for the stiletto was in *my* hand, and the assassin was kneeling at *my* feet, firmly held by the throat by my right hand. It was a dark night, and not a soul was visible. The lamps flickered forth their feeble light, but too faintly for me to recognise my recumbent foe.

‘If you dare cry out, I’ll stab you without mercy,’ I said in Italian, and gripped the man’s throat all the more closely.

‘*Perdonatemi, Signor!*’ murmured he, over and over again.

‘Why are you my enemy? what have I done to you, that you should seek to take my life—eh?’

No answer.

‘Tell me whose orders you obey in



seeking to take my life? Refuse to answer me, and I'll'—and I tickled the part of his neck behind his left ear with the pointed blade of the sharp dagger.

‘Mercy!’ cried the man.

‘Answer my question,’ said I.

He paused a moment, and then replied, ‘Il Principe Inglese hired me to assassinate you for a hundred ducats.’

It was as I thought. I took out of my pocket-book a sheet of paper and a pencil, and made the bravo write his confession. It ran as follows: ‘I hereby swear, by the Holy Virgin and by St. John, my patron saint, that I was offered by the Lord Edgeware the sum of 10,000 pauls—5000 of which were paid me in advance—if I would secretly murder Il Signor Disney, an English artist. I attempted to do my duty on the evening of February 14, 18—, at ten o'clock; but Il Signor Disney defeated me,

and has forced me to write this document.

—GIOVANNI LEONI.'

'That will do,' said I, relinquishing my guard over him, and taking the paper; 'and now, good-night.'

'My stiletto, signor?'

'I prefer to keep it—it may be useful. Who knows whether we may not meet again? *Buon sera!*'—and I walked on; taking remarkably good care to be strictly on my guard against any farther surprise, till I was safely housed in my lodgings.

My wound was but slight, and was perfectly healed at the end of three days. Before the expiration of that time, Lord Edgeware, I had heard, had left Rome in his yacht; so that the bravo's confession, which I had intended handing over to that remarkably vigilant, but inefficient body, the Roman police, was useless; at least as regards Lord Edgeware—and as for

the bravo, I owed him not sufficient malice to take proceedings against him. I wrapped the confession round the stiletto, and resolved to bide my time.

Such was the history of my connection with the man whom I saw now, for the first time since my duel, lounging in the entrance hall of the Trevennis Hotel.





## CHAPTER VI.

### MODERN SOCIETY.

'O friend, I know not which way I must look  
For comfort, being, as I am, opprest  
To think that now our life is only drest  
For show; mean handiwork of craftsman, cook,  
Or groom! We must run, glittering like a brook  
In the open sunshine, or we are unblest;  
The wealthiest man among us is the best:  
No grandeur now in nature or in book  
Delights us. Rapine, avarice, expense:  
This is idolatry; and these we adore.  
Plain living and high thinking are no more;  
The homely beauty of the good old cause  
Is gone.'

**A**S I got out of the brougham, and  
walked up the steps that led to  
the hall, I noticed Lord Edge-  
ware regarding me with the usual 'stony  
stare' of the well-bred Briton. It was evi-

dent that he did not recognise me ; for since I had seen him last, five years ago, my figure had filled out, and my face was adorned or disfigured, whichever you please, with a full black beard almost patriarchal in its length.

He too had changed since last we met beneath the walls of the Coliseum, and not for the better. His face told as plainly as it could tell, that self-indulgence and dissipation had commenced their work of physical destruction. His figure too had gone ; for, instead of his former slender waist, there was an incipient but prophetic corporation. But still he had as much claim to be called a handsome man as formerly, and in his air and general appearance there was still that indefinable something which we snobbishly call 'aristocratic.' As I passed him, he looked at me with that kind of 'who the doose is that fellow' air peculiar

to the English dandy when he meets a stranger. But for my part, when satisfied that he did not recognise me, I ascended the staircase without taking any notice of him. Time had obliterated all feelings of revenge.

When I had entered my room, I lit a cigar, and sat down and meditated. My thoughts instinctively winged their flight to Coombe Royal, and to the events that had occurred within the last few hours.

‘And so at last I have seen and talked with the beautiful and fashionable Lady Trevennis!’ mused I; ‘that great leader of London fashion, whose good word can make a concert-singer’s reputation, give pupils to a music-master, success to an actress’s readings, reputation to an author, wealth to a charitable ball or bazaar, customers to a tradesman, and, I hope in my case, fame to an artist. Well, and notwithstanding all her fashion, she is not so very formidable

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either; a more agreeable friendly woman I never met. And yet her husband does not appreciate her! Fancy marrying a woman like that, and then leaving her for a ship! But perhaps there is no truth in what that scandal-mongering old Newton says about her and her husband; though, by the way, women are rather like ships—they want a deal of management. But Lady Trevennis looks sweetness herself; there couldn't be a more amiable charming woman. What eyes, what a figure, what grace! Ah, I wish I were her husband! I'd see all the ships in the British navy wrecked for want of commanders, and the shores of this bright little, tight little island invaded by the foreign foe, before I'd quit the side of "my own love, my own love." But I say, Harry Disney, this won't do; her ladyship is making a too favourable impression on your heart. I

thought you ridiculed love at first sight; and besides, what's the use of being in love with some one who is so immeasurably above you, and who happens also to have the slight drawback of being already the property of another? Heigho! of course the feeling must be crushed in the bud; but if I ever married, I'd wish my wife to be something like, in fact very much like, Lady Trevennis. And yet, what stories I have heard about her, to be sure—she who is all grace and beauty, and looks as pure as an angel! St. Paul was right: all men, especially club-men, *are* liars.'

I was interrupted in the current of my thoughts by a knock at my door, and Mr. Newton entered.

'Have you lunched yet, sir?' said he.

'Thanks, yes; two hours ago.'

I knew this question was only an excuse



for intruding himself; for his waiters always attended upon me.

‘And pray, sir, what do you think of Coombe Royal? A baronial residence, isn’t it, sir, fit for a peer?’ asked he.

‘What little bird told you I had been at Coombe Royal, if you please?’

‘A little bird, sir, that wets his beak at my bar pretty often—Lady Trevennis’s coachman. He told me as how he had driven you over—said something about you having saved milady’s life.’

‘I don’t know about saving Lady Trevennis’s life; but I was fortunate to stop her horses, which ran away with her near Rayleigh, and so perhaps saved her from some severe accident,’ replied I.

‘The example of them horses will be infectious some of these days, and be imitated by the superior animals,’ said he sarcastically.

‘I fail to understand you, Mr. Newton. It is my want of comprehension; but sometimes you are too deep for me. What do you mean?’

‘Well, I mean, sir (and no offence, I hope, by the question), is all this painting a “blind,” and are you going to follow the example of milady’s horses, and run away with her too?’

I turned round, and looked at him with angry astonishment.

‘Mr. Newton, such a question is a gross insult to Lady Trevennis, and one most unbecoming for you, a former servant of her ladyship, to make. I beg of you not to say anything of the kind in my presence again. I have heard you say many things far from complimentary about Lady Trevennis; but it is only to-day that I have been able to prove how untrue they were; for until to-day I have never had the pleasure of the

acquaintance of Lady Trevennis. Have the kindness not to repeat the offence to me,' said I haughtily.

'I am sorry I have offended you, Mr. Disney,' said the old man with dignity; 'and far be it from me to say a bad word against any one who bears the name of the family to whom I and my forefathers have been indebted for everything. But it is because I look upon Lady Trevennis as not a true Trevennis—as one who thinks too lightly of the proud name she bears by marriage, and of the position she occupies as the wife of the gallant old Sir John—that I feel prejudiced against her. Ah, sir, you little know milady; for if you did, you would say a more dangerous woman doesn't exist on this earth. Who so sweet, so charming, on a first acquaintanceship, as her ladyship? and yet, for all that, she has wrecked the happiness of many a man simply to gra-

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tify her own idle vanity and the promptings of her cold selfish heart. Don't misinterpret me, sir; I don't say milady is guilty; for in the world, and among the very great who are so protected by the influence of their name and position, and are surrounded by so many opportunities, it is very difficult to tell where flirtation ends and criminality begins. I don't say she is *now* a faithless wife; but this I say, that if she goes on as she is doing, she certainly will be. You were angry with me just now for hinting at an elopement; and yet I know that last autumn Captain Scroope Dorset—you know him, perhaps, sir? Lord Firkin's eldest son, one of the best-looking men in the Guards; he came down here, after carrying on a desperate flirtation with milady for the last two seasons, for no other purpose than to ask Lady Trevennis to run away with him; but he asked in vain. And others

have asked too, I know; and do you mean to tell me that a married woman who encourages flirtation to such an extent is a model wife?"

'But what if all this about Lady Trevennis is only malicious scandal?' I interrupted.

'Ay, sir, but I know it isn't. As a rule, I believe nothing I hears, and precious little of what I sees; but with regard to milady, I have seen enough of her to make me jump very rapidly to conclusions; and therefore, when I saw a gentleman of your distinguished appearance coming to Weedoncliffe at this time of the year, I said to myself, "Another moth fluttering round the brilliant Lady Trevennis," and I thought at first that you were only biding your time to follow the example of Captain Dorset. Well, sir, I am very glad to hear you say that you and Lady Trevennis are strangers,

and that you are not in love with her, for you would stand precious little chance now; for of all her swains, there isn't one so favoured as that ornament to the British peerage who is doing me the honour at the present moment to make my humble hotel his abode—Lord Edgeware.'

'What! do you mean to say that Lady Trevennis is a friend of Lord Edgeware's?'

'I do, sir, and a very great friend, I can assure you. I did hear, though, by the way, from Lady Trevennis's own maid, who told the butler, who told the housekeeper, who told me, that there had been a tiff between milady and his lordship; but I suppose it is all smoothed over now by my lord a-coming down here. I've been pumping his lordship's man; but he's as close as wax, or our borough yonder, and won't talk. I shouldn't be surprised, though, if his visit here is somewhat of the same nature as that

of the late Captain Dorset of respected memory. Ah, it is a wicked world !

‘ It is, Mr. Newton, and I hope you will do all in your power to render it less wicked ; and if you cease to be so suspicious and censorious, you will have made a step in the right direction.’

‘ Ah, very well, sir : it’s hard to convince a man against his will, and none blinder than those who won’t see. You think me unduly prejudiced against milady ; but all I can say is, that I hope your acquaintance with her will be so brief as not to make you find out that I have spoken truly.’

‘ And I, on the contrary, trust that our acquaintance, begun so pleasantly to-day, will continue for ever,’ replied I.

‘ And if it continues for ever, it will cease to be an acquaintance,’ answered he drily.

I paid no attention to his insinuation; and after one or two remarks about the clearness of the weather, or the dryness of the roads, or something of that nature, he quitted my room.

His far from flattering observations upon Lady Trevennis I dismissed from my mind with hardly a second thought. Servants are notoriously a prejudiced and scandal-loving class, and I looked upon Mr. Newton as a man who took his master's part in the domestic feud between Sir John and his Lady (if feud there were) because it best suited his own interests. Perhaps Sir John, like most sailors, was as fickle and inconstant as the ocean he lived on, and failing, from his coarseness of temperament, to appreciate the purity and refinement of his wife, acted in such a manner as to estrange all her feelings of love and respect. And then servants, ignorant, and with a natural anti-



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pathy to those they serve, always exaggerate and talk about the most trivial things! No doubt a beautiful woman like Lady Trevennis was fond of receiving homage from the sterner sex, and perhaps some conceited puppy fancied that the manner in which his homage was accepted gave him hope, and so was led to prefer a fruitless suit; and, of course, the world, with its usual malice, put the worst construction upon all that it saw or heard; and hence stories got about respecting her which men like Newton, who love to hear evil of their neighbour, believed and took every opportunity of circulating. And besides, what beauty ever does escape calumny? No, nothing would induce me to believe that that charming graceful woman, with whom I had conversed a few hours ago, was other than a true high-bred lady—an ornament to her sex, and an honour to the nation that gave her birth.

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But of Lord Edgware I thought much. That he and Lady Trevennis were acquainted with each other was not surprising, since they were both among the prominent leaders of fashion; but that they were friends I believed almost impossible. Between a woman like Lady Trevennis and a man of Lord Edgware's abandoned character I hoped there could be nothing in common beyond the ordinary demands of society upon either. And yet I feared that wicked Earl. I knew enough of him to be well aware that, if he intended to lay siege to Lady Trevennis's heart, he would leave no effort untried to attain his end. The five years that had intervened since our memorable meeting had improved him neither physically nor morally. All that it had done was to make him more accomplished in the arts of intrigue, and in the science of pleasing—when he chose. He was still

unmarried; for in his eyes matrimony was about the worst use you could put a man to; and at last that patient, but ever watchful class of mammalia, the mothers of England, had almost given him up in despair, and had begun to turn their disinterested eyes elsewhere. It was, however, some consolation to them that the rich prize after which they had so keenly angled was not yet hooked. And so they still hoped on.

The reputation which Lord Edgeware enjoyed was not limited to his own country; he was as well known at Paris, Vienna, Berlin, and St. Petersburg, as he was in London. His immense wealth, his ancient title, his luxurious profligacy, and the fabulous sums he expended on the gratification of any passing taste, caused him to be regarded as the prince of *viveurs*. The wealthy Earl was society's favoured guest and the world's privileged sinner.

And he did sin right royally. His name had once occupied a by no means enviable position in a certain *cause célèbre* brought before that matrimony-repelling tribunal, the Divorce Court; but of the 'hushed-up cases,' which' never saw the light of justice, only his lawyers could accurately tell; the discriminating public, however, what with club talk, mysterious insinuations in the newspapers, and the sudden accession to wealth of certain husbands, made a pretty shrewd guess at their number. In that faubourg of secret vice, St. John's-wood, he had built a magnificent lodge dedicated to Bacchus, Venus, and High-play. Within its walls occurred those orgies and *petits soupers* which would have done credit to the Regency, and which were the talk of the town.

The only sport he cared for, if sport it can be called, was pigeon-shooting; and at

Hurlingham and Shepherds Bush he was constant in his attendance, and a frequent prize-winner. His cruelty was essentially feminine, that is to say, refined and cowardly, and he was just the man to shirk tiger-hunting (as he did in India), and to take delight in massacring a dove.

It was this love of seeing pain inflicted in safety that made him a prominent patron of the ring, and on the velvet lawn in front of his 'Lodge,' carefully secluded from the eyes of vulgar observers, many a prize-fight between the Pimlico Pet and the Bermondsey Welcher took place, his lordship feasting with greedy eyes on the sickening sight. There too he revived that noble amusement, so beloved by our ancestors, of cock-fighting. But all sports essentially English and manly in their character he religiously eschewed. He hunted but mildly; he hated deer-stalking, but he dearly loved a battue; he was a

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great supporter of the turf, and regarded, from the box of his drag, with supreme indifference a serious accident to his jockey, or the death of one of his horses whilst attempting an impossible water-jump; yet he would as soon have thought of riding a steeple-chase himself as an alderman would of becoming a vegetarian; he delighted in yachting—in calm weather; and, in fact, he was more or less fond of anything that did not tend to endanger his precious life.

It was this love of safety that made him so at home in the drawing-room, ball-room, and in society generally. There he was in his element, and in justice it must be said, that no one could be more agreeable *there*, when he chose. His quiet well-bred air; his dandyism, occasionally supercilious and slightly impertinent, but never vulgar; his manners, polished to perfection by contact with the best society in every capital of

Europe; and his soft musical voice, combined with an appearance that many considered handsome, and all considered distinguished, made him at first sight a decided acquisition to his order.

It was difficult to believe that that gentleman-like inoffensive-looking man was *the* Lord Edgeware—the man whose vices were the talk of every capital, and of whom more stories were told than are in the *Arabian Nights*. But men—and it was only with men that he appeared in his true colours—who knew the difference that existed between his appearance and his character were well aware that that face was no index of the infernal nature of its owner. They knew that those soft manners hid the cruelty and treachery of the cat; that that soft voice only spoke to lie and cajole, and when in anger only to coarsely insult; that those blue eyes were only illumined by the light of desire; and

that of generosity he had none—of morals he had none; and of kindness and of the faintest suspicion of religion he was totally deficient. Since the days when the Serpent of serpents trailed—at the bidding of his Master—his tortuous form along the ground, there sneaked no more plausible offspring of his through the weeds and flowers of society than the Right Honourable the Earl of Edgeware.

And society was aware of the fact. At first that polite body, which is supposed to give the tone to manners and morality, refused to regard him in his true light. He was a delightful young man; so high-spirited and full of fun—no false delicacy, &c.; in short, they judged him in the ‘young men will be young men’ kind of tone. But society could make that excuse no longer; for now he was not a young man, but a middle-aged one, who ought to have sown



his wild oats; that is to say, if there be any time when a man ought to follow vice, and not virtue. He was not a brand plucked from the burning; but one, on the contrary, which was burning with a more lurid light than ever on the world's even surface. He stood out more prominently than any man of his time who was travelling with him along the broad and easy way which leads to Avernus. And yet every one, every sex, every thing extended his, her, or its hand to this *Prince des viveurs*. And why?—on account of his title and his 100,000*l.* a year. Most truly are we a nation of flunkies and shopkeepers. We judge of a man by whom he is, not by what he is; and above all, by what he has, not by what he does with it. The existence of such a man as Lord Edgeware in English society was an insult which five-and-thirty years ago would not have been tolerated. We hounded from

our pure doors the erratic genius of a Byron, whilst we keep and pet an Edgeware! O, consistent and most progressive of nations!

And yet our inconsistency is soon accounted for. We are not a very moral people. We affect a great deal of morality; but affectation everybody knows is only a mask to hide the non-possession of the qualities we affect. Many of our virtues, like many of our vices, are but creatures of fashion, and reaction is often the great cause of both. We become tired of virtue, and then we take to vice (not open Frenchified vice, but a quiet, gentleman-like, negative sort of virtue, which consists in being quite as bad as our neighbours, only in not being quite so often found out—modern virtue is secrecy); and then we become satiated with vice, get into one of our moral fits, which Macaulay so truly satirised, and take to virtue again.

Under the Puritans we were most virtuous; but under the Stuarts a reaction set in, and we were most vicious. During the reigns of William III. and Queen Anne we became, in comparison, tolerably quiet and moral; then again coarsely vicious under the first two German Georges, respectably virtuous during the first part of the reign of George III., and, in fact, until the first gentleman of Europe made vice again fashionable by an imitation of the morality of the Restoration. At the accession of our gracious Majesty, thanks to a spotless Queen and a Prince Consort who never dimmed the lustre of virtue, we for many years rigidly followed purity and eschewed vice. Our manners, our morals, and our literature were purer during the first two decades of the Victorian age than they have ever been.

And then a reaction set in. Railways

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had made foreign travel easy, and frequent intercourse with our neighbours caused much of the peculiar morality of the Continent to become engrafted on our own. We began to think that there was some charm in the gilding which enveloped the sins of 'foreigners.' Between our own Sunday and that of the Continent what a lamentable difference there was ! The pettiest English shopkeeper who had once stayed a week in Paris began to vote the Sabbath of his ancestors a bore, and to sigh for the 'lively Sunday of the Continent.' Society agreed with him, and commenced the work of desecration, which has been steadily going on ; till soon, no doubt, England will equal her more lively neighbours in this respect. Then, too, we began to discover that our literature was as dull as our Sunday, and that the novels of France were the only books worth reading. Our novelists took their

cue from the public taste; and hence we have that delightful species of literary pabulum, written chiefly by ladies, where the wit is *double entendre*, and the love sensuality. Our theatres, catering for the public, gave up dramas whose plots were intelligent and whose dialogue was smart for plays that permitted young actresses to do perfect justice to a snow-white bosom and to well-made legs, and afforded athletic actors sensational opportunities of displaying their activity. An indecent woman, who could act with spirit an indecent play, was sure of being most powerfully supported,—only our prudery demanded that the play should be in French, and the actress a foreigner.

In addition to what we learnt from abroad, society at home was being organised on a different footing. Birth was fast giving place to money, and Plutus was the golden calf

before whom all fell down and worshipped. Money being the only object worthy of attainment, the tone of society soon changed from the respectably dull to the lively fast. The social world no longer meant men and women of birth and breeding, of refinement and education, but simply the moneyed classes. Before the noble deity of filthy lucre all castes blended together, and from the union arose a new order of manners. Ladies of fashion talked openly about the leaders of the *demi-monde*, asked their husbands all about them, imitated their style of dress, dyed or stained their hair like them, drove the same kind of phaetons, with the same-sized ponies, stared at their 'frail sisters' almost admiringly whenever they met face to face in the park, at the opera, on race-courses, &c., and vowed, after all, there wasn't *so* much difference between the sexed and the unsexed.

And they were right.

Nor was the conduct of the men a whit better. The Corinthians, Maccaronis, and Bucks of past times, though they paid scant respect to virtue, yet felt that on certain occasions restraint was necessary, and that there was a time for all things. *Mais nous avons changé tout cela.* Our dandies and swells of the present day lean over the rails of the 'Row,' and talk openly to the blue-habited young woman of easy virtue, which they have made still easier; or they nod to her and chat with her, as her suspicious-looking brougham, with the inevitable pug at the window, makes its appearance in the ring. At the opera they enter with charming taste the boxes of these fair sirens, and openly converse with them in the very face of their mothers and sisters. In the drawing-room they talk freely about matters which swells of former times and

manners would never have dreamt of mentioning. Though they hold a brogue or a provincial dialect in the profoundest contempt, their language is freely and forcibly garnished with slang and horsey phrases.

But in defence of the conduct of our young men it must be owned, that much of their present retrogression in morality is due to the behaviour of the young ladies themselves. Reaction again ! Our grandmothers said 'sir' to their fathers, and stood up in the presence of their parents till permission was given them to sit down. They paid great deference to their eldest brother and sister, were very prudish in society, and very shy of young men. They seldom went to the opera, and when they did go, never stayed for the ballet. On the whole, they were always more or less stiff and staid, and intensely respectable. When our mothers were girls a more genial kindly tone set in,



and much of the former austerity between parent and child was mitigated; intercourse between the sexes was easy without being free, and our literature and our amusements did all in their power to keep society tolerably pure and healthy.

But gradually, as money became the be-all and end-all of our wishes, plutocratic tastes set in, which soon resulted in lavish expenditure, ostentation, and artificiality—consequences of the moneyed classes superseding the aristocracy and the landed gentry. Marriage became socially impossible under at least a thousand a year, and hardly even on that. The clubs became full, and new clubs were started, which in their turn soon also became full. Young men scorned the idea of ‘going into society,’ and indulged in equivocal tasks which made the idea all the more disagreeable to them.

The young women, in retaliation for

being neglected by the young men, determined to show that they were quite independent of the 'lords of creation.' And the better to evince their independence, they assumed a manner totally unfeminine, and cared only for amusements and pleasures unbecoming to their sex.

Thus arose the 'fast girl'—that charming ornament of her sex, who talks slang to the men, and Rochefoucauld and impurity to her female companions; reads French novels; makes up for every deficiency of nature by every invention of art; stains her hair; paints her face, and improves her figure if it requires improvement, by pectoral illusions, waist-contractors, haunch-pads, false chignons, and false heels; dresses like a *cocotte*, and is often mistaken for one, which she almost looks upon as a compliment; flirts most reprehensibly with her cousins, or with any young man whom she fancies; knows the

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Army List and her Burke by heart; has visited 'for fun' the Mabile and Cremorne; in society is noisy and garrulous, which she considers vivacity;—is, in fact, the *bête noir* of all well-conducted people, yet in spite of all her endeavours, she is not so much admired as she fancies by young men, who, as a general rule, prefer the genuine article to the imitation. Perhaps, after all, men who talk about their experiences of country-house life, garrison towns, and of society generally, do not draw so much upon their imaginations as we wish to suppose.

I am afraid this digression will bore you; but you know, my dear Atholl (you who are such a recluse), how often you wondered that such a man as the Earl of Edgeware should be received in society. Perhaps, then, the above remarks will make you wonder less, and think that, after all, he was not

so very much out of place within its circles. I too wondered, till accidental circumstances showed me only too plainly that much of English society, notwithstanding the irreproachable respectability of its exterior, is only rottenness and hypocrisy within.

When Englishmen discover that the acquisition of wealth is not the 'whole duty of man,' then, and not till then, shall we hear less of fraudulent bankrupts, of city delinquencies, of turf and card scandals, and of sharp practices generally, in social and commercial life. And when Englishwomen find out that the most brilliant *mariage de convenance*, notwithstanding all its social results, is not the happiest existence for their daughters, then, and not till then, may we expect to see the Divorce Court eased of its labours, and our young women cease from wearing their hearts in their purses, and unsexing themselves for

attraction's sake. But not till then will society be pure and healthy, and be able to cast consistently the first stone at Lord Edgeware and his contemptible followers.





## CHAPTER VII.

### WALLS HAVE EARS.

'Being your slave, what should I do but tend  
Upon the hours and times of your desire?  
I have no precious time at all to spend,  
Nor service to do, till you require.

\* \* \* \*

So true a fool is love, that in your will,  
Though you do anything, he thinks no ill.'

**A**T the same time that I was engaged on my portrait of Lady Trevennis, I was painting for the British Institution a small water-colour sketch of the little village of Brecon-super-Mare.

The morning after my visit to Coombe Royal, I took up my portfolio, intending to walk over the downs to Brecon, and compare my sketch with the little place itself.

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Between Weedoncliffe and Brecon there is, as you know, a series of grassy hills, broken into numerous gentle plains covered with furze and heather, which is called the Tor Moor. On the Brecon side this moor slopes down till it meets the east end of the sea-walk, which is the chief promenade of Brecon. Skirting for some three hundred yards this sea-walk is the extreme north of the park of Sir John Trevennis, defended from all possible marine accidents by a high stone wall, which at the same time effectually prevents the pedestrian on the parade from looking into the park.

The walk bordering the Tor Moor, between Brecon and Weedoncliffe, is the chief fashionable promenade in the summer season of the various visitors who patronise either of the little watering-places; and I know no prettier walk in England than those serpentine Tor paths, which now hang over the

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blood-red cliffs, revealing the sea churning its foaming waves against the grand needle-pointed rocks that lie like melted lava along the beach, and then again wind their route inland through rocky passes, wooded glades, and grassy valleys, whose sides teem with heather and furze. I believe the Tor Moor is the chief cause of the popularity of these two South Devon watering-places, and well it deserves it.

The morning I had chosen for my walk was one cold and boisterous. All night the wind had blown strongly from the north-east, and the sea was lashed into stormy waves, the sea-green billows being crested with a lathering surf as far as the eye could reach. The clouds over the horizon were black as an eagle's wing, but overhead the sky was flecked with little patches of blue, that came out in most artistic relief to the white fleecy clouds that rose like vast snow-



mountains in the heavens, as if on purpose to hide the rays of the struggling sun, that tipped with burnished gold their feathery borders.

As I walked along the deserted moor, the only sounds that broke upon my ear were the shrill cries of the wheeling seagulls and the solemn roar of the ocean dashing its waters against the iron-bound coast. A few sheep were browsing upon the short and scanty blades of grass, and — save for the shepherd in the distance — not a soul was near me.

What a contrast to the Tor Moor in the summer, with its verdant sward, its foliaged trees, and its paths crowded with well-dressed chattering women, knickerbockered dandies, city clerks, broken-kneed ponies, and broken-winded parsons !

After an hour's sharp walking I descended the sandy undulation which leads .

on to Brecon sea-walk, and leisurely wandered along the rough uneven stones which constitute that fashionable promenade. I had not proceeded a hundred yards before I arrived at a large green door let into the wall of Sir John Trevennis's park, and which was no doubt intended as an exit from the park on to the marine promenade, for the inhabitants of Coombe Royal. It was slightly ajar, and curiosity prompted me to take a peep within.

At some distance was a man with a wheelbarrow and a broom, sweeping the dead leaves from off the gravel path that, like a great yellow serpent, wound round the extreme limits of the park, till it was lost in the thickness of the trees that bordered on Breckmere Forest.

My inspection, however, was soon withdrawn by hearing steps upon the pebbly gravel, in an opposite direction to that in

which I was looking, and the sound of a voice whose soft accents I recognised immediately.

I had barely time to shrink back from the open door, when there passed before me on the park walk — Lady Trevennis and Lord Edgeware.

I know no feeling harder to conquer, when once really excited, than curiosity; instead of a mere emotion, it becomes then a passion. I eagerly wanted to know what they were talking about, in order to judge of the nature of their intimacy. All sense of self-respect, all dictates of honour, were lost in that one raging thirst for information. At every hazard I determined to satisfy my curiosity.

I gently approached the half-open door, and—shame upon me for having to own it! —listened intently.

The speakers were not fifty feet from

me, and I concluded that they were seated, from their voices always issuing from the same direction.

‘Your visit is as unwelcome as it is unexpected. I had hoped that all intercourse would have ceased between us after our parting at Paris. You can hardly forget what occurred on that occasion, Lord Edgeware,’ I heard Lady Trevennis say in cold measured tones.

‘My gentle madam, how cruel you are!’ replied Lord Edgeware, with supreme non-chalance. ‘You do not for one moment imagine that I took *au sérieux* what you said. My experience of your fascinating sex has before now taught me that a woman’s negative means just the opposite; when she says don’t, she means do, and when she says no, she really means yes, only that she is not able to rid herself of that love of deception so inherent in her nature,

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and which she indulges on every opportunity, even when there is nothing to be gained by it. Therefore I can assure you that I do not pay the smallest attention to those angry words you were pleased, or rather displeased, to utter at that memorable state ball; and I freely forgive you. Indeed, if Hertford had not asked me to prolong my stay with him, I should have seen you before. By the way, who do you think passed through Paris when I was there?"

'I really cannot guess, and I can assure you that the question does not excite my curiosity,' said Lady Trevennis wearily.

'Why, Harry Luscombe and Mrs. Wynstone.'

'Then it *is* true that she has eloped?"

'Looks uncommonly like it, I should say; especially as he told me they were off to Monaco.'

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‘I had hoped Mrs. Wynstone had more sense. [I felt pained that she said sense instead of principle.] When will silly women learn that the worst husband is better than the best lover?’ said Lady Trevennis.

‘Really, I don’t agree with you!’ answered Lord Edgware, with more earnestness than I had imagined his indolent nature to be capable of.

‘I did not expect that you *would* agree with me,’ replied Lady Trevennis drily. ‘I presume, however, that you did not come all the way from Paris to inform me of the elopement of Mrs. Wynstone. May I ask to what I am indebted for the renewal of an acquaintanceship that had far better cease?’

‘Why this forced coldness? Do you not remember—’ and here his voice for a few minutes sunk so low that I was unable to catch a word.

‘Let the past be forgotten, I beg; it

is neither manly nor generous to remind me of it, when you see that it is distasteful to me,' answered Lady Trevennis, with angry hauteur.

'I regret that I cannot reciprocate your sentiments,' said he drily. 'I have no wish to forget the past, for it is anything but distasteful to me. And,' added he, after a slight pause, 'it *was* not distasteful to you. Really, my dear creature, you are as changeable as this detestable climate!' Again he dropped his voice, and I heard nothing for some time but indistinct murmurings.

I pushed the park-door a little farther open, and placing myself against the opposite wall, managed to catch an oblique view of the speakers. I could see Lord Edgeware seated on a rustic garden bench, one of his white profusely-ringed hands clasped around the back bar of the seat, whilst the other was beating time to what he said in

earnest gesticulation. All that I could perceive of Lady Trevennis were her dress and her slender fingers playing nervously with her gauntlet-gloves, which lay on her lap; her face and the upper part of her figure were concealed from me by a projecting wall. Suddenly she rose from her seat, her beautiful face flushed with anger. She stood directly in front of Lord Edgeware, and her haughty attitude—expressive of defiance and indignation—would have done credit to Juno.

‘By what right do you speak to me thus? How dare you address to me—’ she began angrily.

‘My dear Lady Trevennis, pray do not lose your temper,’ said his lordship, in the calmest and easiest manner. ‘You ask me by what right I said to you what I did? My dear madam, you know perfectly well by what right, though perhaps you may



have forgotten, or rather, do not *now* choose to remember;' and here again his voice dropped so low that I was unable to distinguish what he was saying.

It was evidently no agreeable intelligence; for Lady Trevennis became very pale and looked nervous.

'You cannot mean what you say,' said she rapidly; 'you dare not own yourself so *lâche*.'

'I should advise you not to put to the test what I mean or what I dare,' said his lordship, smiling maliciously, and rising from his seat. 'I ask no immediate answer; but when the answer comes, it must be no refusal; for if then you refuse, I shall amuse myself by showing to your friends and mine the contents of this charming little packet of letters;' and he drew from his breast-pocket a few envelopes carefully tied up, and then replaced them. 'You have,

like most women, your enemies, you know, who will be only too glad to spread unkindly slander about you; and why compel me to do this?' And for two or three minutes he spoke almost in a whisper; but it was evident that he was pleading very hard about something.

At first, from the expression of her face, I thought Lady Trevennis was going to soften towards him; but after what seemed a struggle within herself, she said haughtily:

'Lord Edgeware, I desire that this interview may cease, and that you will instantly quit my presence. Indeed, I am almost inclined to believe that you are either mad or inebriated, to have—'

'Not at all,' interrupted his lordship coolly. 'I can assure you, you are mistaken. I never had enough brains to go mad upon, and I make it a rule never to drink till the evening. It is chiefly your

charming sex that takes to that now before dinner !'

'You need not make your society here still more objectionable by any farther offensive remarks,' continued her ladyship, her pale cheeks lit up by two angry red spots. 'Once for all, Lord Edgeware—and this time have the kindness *not* to doubt my word—I have no wish ever to see you again. I am glad of this visit but for one reason, and that is, that I have seen you in your true colours. Leave me, sir! and were it consistent with my sense of self-respect, I would order yonder gardener to hasten your departure !'

'Why, my dear creature, I never intended to offend you ; I'd give my soul to you, indeed I would, if you wanted it.'

'Thank you ; I have, perhaps, quite enough to do to take care of my own. You walked over here, I believe—your shortest

way back to Weedoncliffe will be through that green door, which opens on to the sea-walk ;' and she pointed to the door at which I was listening.

'My *congé*! Well, I humbly take my departure. Shall I ask your gardener to escort me? I see he is sweeping up dead leaves into his barrow. I wonder whether he has found any of your good intentions amongst them? Some fortresses hold out longer than others ; but I seldom knew one that did not capitulate after a persistent siege. For the present, however, I raise the siege—and my hat,' said he, bowing with mocking politeness. 'Still, remember that I only say *au revoir*, and not farewell. My dear Lady Trevennis, in spite of your present tragedy air, we shall soon meet again. *Au revoir*!' And he walked down the gravel path, towards the door against which I leant.

In an instant I quitted my position, and

jumped over the sea-wall on to the beach, where I remained crouched against the wall till I heard Lord Edgeware's steps wending their way along the parade in the direction of Weedoncliffe, his lordship humming the while 'Pour une femme seule je ne suis pas bégueule.' When he was out of sight, I mounted again on the walk, and approached the door.

Lady Trevennis was seated on the same spot just vacated by Lord Edgeware. Her beautiful face was deadly pale, and I could see she was in deep thought. Her figure was slightly bent forward, her hands clasped, and her eyes were gazing fixedly in front of her.

I endeavoured to recollect the fragments of the conversation I had overheard, and to see if I could fill up by conjecture what my ears had failed to acquire. I believe I succeeded. It was evident that Lord

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Edgeware regarded Lady Trevennis with feelings far stronger than friendship, and that the object of his visit had been farther to ingratiate himself with her. It was also evident that those feelings were not reciprocated by Lady Trevennis, and that Lord Edgeware had failed most signally where he expected to be an easy victor. And yet he was not a man to prefer claims unless pretty sure of their being accepted. He must have received some sort of encouragement from that fair dame to have spoken to her as I had heard him. There was an air of impertinent assurance, an ease intensely ill-bred, I thought, about him in his interview with Lady Trevennis, very unlike the man; for, whatever faults Lord Edgeware possessed, in justice be it said that he was invariably polite and most courtly in his manner to those ladies whom he termed 'modest women.' It was only when a wo-

man had compromised herself with him that the devil in the man appeared. Why, then, should he not have acted to Lady Trevennis as the polished gentleman he knew so well how to assume? Those letters? Ah, I had forgotten them! 'My fair madam,' muttered I to myself, 'if you have placed yourself in Lord Edgware's power, no matter how innocently, he will lie, garble, blacken, and distort everything, the better to further the ends he has in view. Indeed, I earnestly trust that you have not given that base heartless peer the slightest claim to authority over you.'

A sudden thought struck me, and I determined to act upon it without farther reflection.

I opened the green door, and walked boldly in towards Lady Trevennis, who was still seated, buried in thought. The sound of my footsteps aroused her from her reverie.

‘Mr. Disney!’ she said in tones of astonishment, not unmixed with hauteur.

I took off my hat and bowed. What the deuce was I to do? It was no easy or pleasant task for me to say, ‘Madam, I have been listening to your conversation with Lord Edgeware whilst behind yonder door, and I see that you are in some trouble; can I be of the slightest assistance to you? If so, I am at your service.’ It was not easy, I say, to utter this; and yet that was my object in intruding myself upon her. I felt shy, and hesitated.

‘I—I was about to go to Brecon,’ murmured I, not knowing very well how to commence my difficult task.

‘O, and you thought this was the public pathway through the park? You are mistaken; the path across the park to Brecon is much higher up; no doubt that open door misled you?’



I had no idea that there *was* a short cut open to the public through the park; but I seized upon the excuse; for I wanted to back out of my 'sudden thought.' I apologised for my intrusion, and was about to retire.

'I should have been happy to have shown you the park path,' said she smiling, and shaking hands with me; 'but I am suffering from neuralgia.'

I determined that I would act up to my sudden thought.

I regretted to hear it, and said that galvanism was the only real cure for neuralgia.

'O yes, I have heard so,' said she listlessly; 'but in the country could I get a shock?'

'I think I can give you one, Lady Trevennis.'

And then I told her *very* judiciously a *little* of what I had seen and heard.

'But, Mr. Disney,' said she haughtily,

and it was only with difficulty I saw that she controlled her anger, 'this conduct is mean to a degree. Yesterday you behaved like a brave man and a gentleman ; but to-day like a coward and no gentleman. I am utterly ashamed of you.'

'And I, madam, am utterly ashamed of myself. I came to you, however, not merely to confess, but to ask your permission to expiate my fault.'

'I do not understand you. What do you mean ?'

'I mean this. Am I wrong in supposing that you would be glad to have those letters back again which his lordship now possesses? Give me your leave, and I will do all in my power to place them soon in your hands.'

A flash of joy broke over her face, and then disappeared almost immediately—like lightning from a thunder-cloud.

‘But how will you obtain possession of them, Mr. Disney?’ said she, in a soft low voice, more melodious to me than the music of the spheres.

‘That, I think, had better be left to me,’ said I. ‘I suppose you do not mind what means I adopt, so long as the letters come into your hands?’

She hesitated. ‘You must not hint that *I* have commissioned you to obtain them.’

‘Certainly not. The matter will simply be between Lord Edgeware and myself. You wish to have these letters?’

‘O, I should,’ she began eagerly, but suddenly changed to a calmness that I knew was forced—‘I should like, of course, to have them back, because—because they contain remarks upon people which I certainly would not wish everybody to know; and in the hands of an unprincipled man like

Lord Edgeware might be used as formidable weapons against me. You know Lord Edgeware, I think you said?’

I explained that I had met him at Rome some six years ago, and that he had grossly insulted me; but that it was about a matter I did not wish to repeat. I believed him to be a most dishonourable man, and a disgrace to society.

‘And I quite agree with you now, Mr. Disney. I made the acquaintance of Lord Edgeware about two years ago, when staying a winter at Nice. He was then very much *épris* with a cousin of mine, who died a few months ago—Lady Harriet Seede, a daughter of Lord Carroway. I did all in my power to prevent anything like an engagement taking place, as I did not think the marriage a suitable one. Lady Harriet was not a happy woman, and of a very uncertain temper; and as a friend of Lord

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Edgware (for I foolishly refused *then* to believe all I heard about him), I wrote to him freely, and perhaps indiscreetly, about Lady Harriet and several other people in society who were anxious for the match to take place. These letters he appears to have kept, and now intends making them public, because we have quarrelled. You can imagine, therefore, that the prospect is not a pleasing one for me, especially as these letters contain very severe strictures on many who are now friends and acquaintances of mine. You say you overheard very indistinctly what we said — indeed, situated as you were, I wonder at your being able to have heard a word; but still, Mr. Disney, your conduct was most reprehensible, and such as in future will entirely prevent my taking any farther interest in your career. I thought it my duty to tell you the nature of those letters, because you might put a

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wrong construction upon Lord Edgeware's interview with me.'

'And can I not obtain pardon from you for what I have done? Will nothing that I can do be taken as some extenuation for my offence? Believe me' (and here I told a downright lie; so surely does one wrong act lead to another), 'it was only when I heard Lord Edgeware speaking in a threatening voice about the letters, that I turned and listened.'

'And you heard nothing more of our conversation than what you have just told me?' said she quickly.

'Nothing. I simply heard Lord Edgeware state that he had in his possession certain letters of yours, the contents of which he threatened to expose' (lie no. 2), replied I.

'You heard nothing about our previous conversation? How long were you stationed

at yonder door before you came and spoke to me?" asked she.

'About two minutes. I heard Lord Edgeware's voice as I was walking along the sea-walk, and I stopped to hear what he was speaking about. I had no idea, of course, that he was talking to you till I heard your voice' (lie no. 3).

She looked relieved.

'He is a great scoundrel, that Lord Edgeware,' said I; 'and the sooner your ladyship drops his acquaintance the better.'

'O, henceforth he and I are strangers, of course, to each other; and it is precisely because I am resolved that we *shall* be strangers that he threatens to show those foolish letters of mine. I had no idea that he was such a man. But some men's characters are so difficult to fathom.'

'As a rule, Lady Trevennis, you will find that men who are difficult to fathom

are seldom worth the fathoming. But I should hardly call Lord Edgeware one of those characters.

There was silence for a few moments between us.

‘Lady Trevennis,’ said I in pleading tones, ‘pray pardon me for having listened. It was a most mean and dishonourable act, I fully admit; but still, if I succeed in obtaining those letters for you, and thus free you from the impertinence of Lord Edgeware, I cannot regret that I have listened, since it will give me another opportunity of doing you a service.’

‘I do not see how you will be able to get those letters,’ said she reflectingly.

‘Nor I as yet; I must leave that to chance. But if I get them, will you cease to be offended with me, and forgive the cause on account of the effect?’

‘Mr. Disney,’ said she, looking at me



frankly in the face, 'it is absurd for me to pretend that I am indifferent about possessing those letters. I can assure you I would give much to have them in my hands again. As long as they are in the possession of Lord Edgeware, I know not what mischief may come of them.'

'Then if they are once returned to you, Lord Edgeware would be quite powerless to annoy you farther?'

'Of course, whilst he has those indiscreet letters of mine in his possession, and especially as he knows what enemies the betrayal of their contents would create against me, he can annoy me very considerably; but when they are once returned to me, he would be deprived of all such means.'

'Very well, Lady Trevennis; I will do all in my power to obtain that precious packet for you. Of course, I will try to get them as secretly as possible; but anyway

I think I can promise to secure them. I must concoct some plan as I walk back.'

'You are indeed kind; and that packet once restored to me will make me most grateful to you. I own that I am asking you to perform a not very honourable act; but if Lord Edgeware intends committing a dishonourable act towards me, and I can only defeat his object by a like act, I have really no other alternative, have I?'

Of course I agreed with her. Beneath the magic influence of her presence I would have agreed to rob the Bank of England, and should have felt perfectly justified in so doing. After a little more conversation, I found out that, provided she had the letters once more in her hands, she was not averse to my taking them, even by force, from Lord Edgeware, so long as no witnesses of the act were near; because then all Lord Edgeware's malicious remarks about her or

about me would simply depend upon his own word, which was hardly considered a trustworthy authority. She would of course infinitely prefer the packet being abstracted unknown to his lordship ; but anything was better than the letters remaining in his power. *Quocumque modo rem!* was her motto.

I promised to return as soon as possible with the packet, and begged Lady Trevennis to cease worrying herself, and to leave the matter confidently in my hands.

‘ I hope you will be successful !’ said she, shaking hands with me as I took my leave.





## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE LETTERS.

'Tis so no more ;

I have submitted to a new control :

My honour is gone, which nothing can restore.

And bitter shame has seized my soul.'

**F**ANCY I can see a smile overspread your face, my dear Atholl, at the contents of my last chapter. That I, the man who above all others railed so often at the selfish heartlessness and coquetry of the sex, who generally scorned all ideas of love, and who held the charms and graces of woman very cheaply, should succumb after a two-mornings' acquaintance with a

fashionable pretty woman, and feel most keenly those emotions which I had invariably ridiculed in others! Yes, it was inconsistent, I grant you; for I must frankly own that, if ever man at first sight loved woman wholly and devotedly, I loved Lady Trevennis. The very fact of my having been so cold towards others of her sex made me all the more subject to those feelings to which I had hitherto been a stranger. Like most cold men, the moment my heart was really touched, I went to the other extreme, and became impulsive, excited, and impassioned. The floodgates of my heart opened *à deux battants*, and love poured in, sweeping away everything in its course, till I was no longer a free subject, but the slave of another.

You laugh! Why? 'Because,' say you, 'men do not fall madly in love after two interviews.' I do not know what other

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men do under similar circumstances; but this I know, that my conduct does not appear extraordinary to me even *now*. Have you never heard of men who have spent half their lives and the greater portion of their energies in condemning some one thing or act in particular, and then have suddenly veered round, and most earnestly supported what before they abused? The very bitterness of their opposition seems to make them easier and quicker to convince. You seldom find a *very* prejudiced man who has been all his life consistent. Jones begins as a Tory of the bluest dye, and disseminates his opinions on every occasion. He visits America, or marries into a demagogue's family, and then all of a sudden is converted, and no republican principles are red enough for him. Brown is one of the fiercest of democrats, who would burn all kings and massacre all lords, till one fine

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day it happens that he shakes hands with a duke, and becomes then and there the most vehement of supporters of an aristocracy. Tomkins is a staunch Protestant, hates the Pope, and (to put it pleasantly) has not a very high idea of the morality of the Roman Catholic priesthood. Accidentally he comes across a book, or hears a sermon, and Protestantism is henceforth the most heterodox of creeds, and the Catholic priesthood are the most self-denying of men. Do we not see daily the fiercest Conservatives become Radicals, Catholics become Protestants, Dissenters become Churchmen, bachelors become Benedicks, enemies become friends, and *vice versa*? Yes, and in seven cases out of ten, the man converted is converted almost instantaneously. It is your man who cares very little about anything save the main chance who is the hardest and the slowest to convince.

And so, to me, it is nothing very extraordinary that I, Harry Disney, a misogynist, who judged women only by theory, and who never gave himself an opportunity of experiencing the subtle force of their charms, should, on suddenly seeing before him the living embodiment of all that he considered most beautiful in woman, at once fall down in blind adoration before that splendid beauty, and worship madly its owner. And I really did worship Lady Trevennis. I was under a spell, and felt powerless to resist the influence that attracted me to her.

And yet at the very outset I saw her faults. She was a coquette; she had deceived me, I felt convinced, about the nature of her interview with Lord Edgeware; she was worldly to a degree; she had not scrupled to ask me to commit a dishonourable act; if she were not false, she was at least danger-



ous; and yet, all the same, Cupid's arrow lay buried in my heart up to its feathered top. Her beauty, her grace, her soft voice, her winsome ways, fascinated me, a solitary recluse. Ah, am I the only man who has loved against his better sense?

But again, do not misunderstand me when I use the word 'love.' I use it in its purely spiritual, super-sensuous sense, and free from all those grosser particles which at first feed its flame till it flares luridly up, and then end by putting it out altogether. I fully believed with Plato, that an absorbing soul-with-soul friendship *could* exist between those of the opposite sex without passion ever entering into the question, and that it could be quite as strong and fervent as what is generally termed love. Nay, more so; for in such friendship there would be no place for the two elements which so often tend to undermine

man's affection — possession and satiety. Such was the friendship—a friendship earnest and yet spotless—that I desired to contract with Lady Trevennis.

As I thought about her on my way to Weedoncliffe, I felt what a claim it would give me to this friendship, if I obtained possession of her ill-fated letters. She would then see that I was the best of all friends—a friend in need. Ah, fairly or foully I must get hold of those letters. But how?

I had entered the shrubbery of the Trevennis Hotel before I arrived at any definite scheme how to attain my end. Numerous plans floated through my mind; but after a brief consideration they had to be abandoned as impracticable. What course was I to adopt? I could not imagine one.

Whilst I was vainly attempting to frame some scheme, I suddenly came across Lord Edgeware, seated on a rustic bench in the

well-wooded shrubbery at the end of the grounds of the hotel facing the sea. He was smoking a cigar, and looking extremely sulky. On hearing my steps, he listlessly turned his head in my direction, and then, deeming me evidently an object unworthy of much attention, he as listlessly turned away his head and resumed his reflections, which did not appear to be of the happiest character from the expression of his face. An idea came into my head.

I walked up to my studio, opened a small box of chemicals which I used for mixing my colours, took out a small phial containing a few drops of a liquid drug which I knew to be a strong and immediate opiate, for I had often used it when in pain, and poured two drops from the phial into a small empty bottle. This done, I put the small bottle into my pocket and went downstairs. I met a waiter in the hall.

‘Bring me a brandy-and-soda in the shrubbery.’

‘Yessir.’

The rustic seat on which I had seen Lord Edgeware was the chief haunt of the young men staying in the hotel who wished to enjoy a quiet smoke. It was about twenty feet long, and had small tables in front of it during the season; but at the dull time of the year when I was at Weedoncliffe, these tables were removed, and only one remained. Lord Edgeware was sitting before this solitary table as I took my seat upon the bench and lit my cigar. He turned round and stared at me, and then went on smoking, taking no farther notice of me.

‘What a very pretty view one gets from this seat!’ said I, commencing the conversation.

‘Yaas, very pretty,’ said his lordship—

who was always affable, and would talk (if he was in the humour) to anybody—‘but I think you’ll get quite as much rheumatism as scenery from this seat, for it’s ’nfernally damp. Had to tell my man to bring a wrapper,’ said the peer, pointing to a thick travelling-rug on which he was sitting.

The waiter now came with my brandy-and-soda, and placed it on the table.

‘Tell my servant when he’s done packing to come here,’ said his lordship to the waiter.

‘Yes, m’lord.’

‘And—ah, bring me a brandy-and-soda too.’

The waiter assented, and departed.

‘I quite agree with Theodore Hook, that there is nothing like a glass of brandy-and-soda for seeing scenery,’ said his lordship to me.

I noticed that he scanned me closely, as if he was trying to remember where he had seen me last.

‘Yes, to many people such a glass is far more serviceable than a telescope,’ replied I.

We went on smoking in silence, till the waiter brought his lordship’s drink, and put it on the table close to mine. Lord Edgeware took it up, and thirstily imbibed about half of its contents.

‘What an ’nfernal dull hole this place Weedoncliffe must be in the season!’ commenced the peer; ‘but, for the matter of that, so are all English watering-places. Englishmen are only lively when they go abroad; for then they leave their religion and morality at the Boulogne or Calais custom-house, to be kept carefully till their return, when they resume those highly-respectable virtues; and, begad, by their out-

ward conduct in England you'd imagine that they had never quitted them. For the life of me, I *cannot* understand why any man who can afford to stay at the seaside don't go to a foreign watering-place.'

'To many English people the manners and customs of foreigners are objectionable,' replied I; 'for Englishmen, if duller than our continental neighbours, are at least far cleaner in their tastes and habits—'

'I really don't agree with you!' broke in his lordship sarcastically. 'We Englishmen—'gad, it's amusing—are pleased to arrogate to ourselves that we are better than our neighbours, and to say that we are more religious, more moral, more polished, better dressed, far more refined, &c.; but it's only our national conceit: indeed, we have actually coined a word expressive of our advanced state of national virtue; for if a man does anything contrary to our

theoretical code of morals, everybody cries out, "How un-English!" What damned humbug, when we are just as bad as our so-called wicked neighbours across the Channel—or rather worse, for we pretend to such a devil of a lot.'

'But at least you must admit that we are, as a nation, far more virtuous than our so-called wicked neighbours,' said I.

'I do not for a moment. In the first place, I believe that English virtue (supposing that it exists) is, in nine cases out of ten, only another word for timidity, or want of opportunity. But however, we need not enter into that question—and pray, do not look so shocked! The reason why we appear nationally to be more respectable than the French is because our women are colder and more experienced; and by experience I mean they possess that knowledge which enables them to commit their faults dis-



creetly, *avec sagesse*, so to speak. In France everybody knows who has a *liaison* with whom; but in England we have our *affaires de cœur* quite as freely as our neighbours, only we don't talk about them. We affect a virtue, if we have it not; and all modern respectability demands is, "don't be found out."

'I differ from you entirely, and I should be very sorry to entertain such views of English society,' said I drily.

'*Comme vous voudrez*,' yawned his lordship.

'What a very pretty woman is walking on that sea-parade!' I exclaimed.

Lord Edgware rose from his seat and advanced a few paces towards the cliff-walk which overhung the parade, in order to have a view of the fair pedestrian, who existed only in my imagination. The exclamation effected my purpose; for no sooner

had the amorous peer quitted the seat and turned his back to me than I dropped the contents of my little bottle into his tumbler. My haste and nervousness was, however, so great, that only one drop fell in, instead of two. I had just time to put the phial back again into my pocket, when the peer returned to his seat.

‘I didn’t see any one.’

‘Perhaps she turned the corner,’ replied I carelessly.

‘I think I have met you somewhere before?’ Lord Edgeware asked, taking up his glass of brandy-and-soda, and emptying it at a draught.

‘Really? Somewhere is, I fear, rather too vague an address for me to further your recollection,’ said I.

‘Well, I don’t know where, I’m sure. Confound this sea air! It either gives a fellow the ague, or makes him bilious and

sleepy,' yawned my lord ; and in a few moments his head fell back against the bench, and he slept profoundly.

I rose up and looked carefully around, so that no strange eyes should spy my dishonourable purpose. No one was near. The trees surrounding us waved their sighing branches as if reproachfully at me, and excluded us completely from the inquisitive windows of the hotel. I approached the sleeping man, who was wrapped in a deep stertorous slumber, and moved about uneasily. His coat was open ; and as I put my hand into its breast-pocket to seize the coveted letters, a dark black cloud passed overhead, intercepting the rays of the sun, as if to shut out from the sight of heaven my villanous act. Stealthily my hand felt its way down the lining of the pocket, but no letters barred its progress. The pocket was perfectly empty.

Lady Trevennis had told me particularly that her letters were kept in Lord Edgeware's breast-pocket. The coat which he had now on—a rough tweed one—was the very same he had worn when talking to Lady Trevennis, and in its pocket I had seen him replace the precious white packet. Where were these letters? I searched in every pocket he had, but in vain. What was I to do? The scheme that I had concocted was futile, and I knew no other to adopt on the spur of the moment. It was evident too that Lord Edgeware was about to quit Weedoncliffe soon, perhaps in an hour or so; for had I not heard him talk to the waiter about his servant packing up his things? Every minute, then, was precious. If I intended to serve Lady Trevennis, I must act immediately.

It was evident that the letters could be nowhere else than in Lord Edgeware's

rooms, and it was there that I should continue my search if I wished to discover them. I did wish. I washed out Lord Edgware's tumbler with part of the contents of my own, and then exchanged glasses. He was still sleeping, and snoring loudly and spasmodically. His face was very red; the eyelids swollen, and the neck and cheeks corrugated—as if circulation was a matter of some difficulty. An awful thought crossed me — suppose he should have an attack of apoplexy! But having gone so far, I determined to proceed with my hateful task.

As I walked to the hotel and ascended the stairs, for the first time in my life I felt how wicked I *could* become. Let man or woman take the first step down the well-lubricated descent of Avernus, and no one can tell where he or she will stop.

The woman who first listened to the honeyed accents of the unprincipled Lothario little thought that from that so simple, so ordinary an act would result seduction or adultery. The young man who took his first pecuniary advantage over some less shrewd a man hardly imagined that such a step would cause him one day to be classed with swindlers, card-sharpers, and perhaps felons. The banker who altered his accounts to make things straight for the moment could trace back to that one act the consequences that brought him to the felon's dock. Every man—no matter for how great a crime he suffers—can let his memory hark back to that *first step* which was so easy to make, so difficult to retrace, down the incline of Avernus.

Lord Edgware's rooms were at the end of the corridor in which my own were situated. Mine, however, looked over the High-

street, whilst his lordship's ran at right angles to the corridor, and commanded a splendid view of the sea. I noticed that the doors leading into his rooms were open; and as I entered, I found a valet busily engaged in arranging his master's clothes preparatory to placing them in two port-manteaus upon the floor.

'You are Lord Edgeware's servant, I believe?' said I.

'Yes, sir,' said the man, looking rather astonished at my presence.

'I left his lordship sleeping in the shrubbery just now, and I think you should look after him; for he seems as if he were going to have a fit of apoplexy.'

The man thanked me for the advice, and at once quitted the apartment.

I took a quick survey of the room. It was an ordinary well-furnished hotel bedroom, and communicated with a handsome

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brushes; the little bottles with pomade for the moustache and hair-dye,—were all laid out on the snow-white toilet-cover with the same care and attention that an æsthetic butler would employ in arranging his master's table for a dinner *à la Russe*.

Close beside these requisites and superfluities of the toilet was a green Russia-leather writing-case very similar to one I had in my own room. It was there, if anywhere, that I guessed Lady Trevennis's letters were placed. I looked along the corridor, and listened attentively; but all was as still as the tomb or Lord Edge-ware's conscience. Taking out my keys, I opened the desk with the key that I used for my own (so much for patent locks!), and lifting up the leathern lid, I found—carefully deposited in a corner of the desk—a white packet sealed at both ends, and indorsed 'Letters from H.' These

were, then, the long-coveted letters ! I seized them greedily, and put them at once in my pocket. Whilst I was shutting up the desk I heard footsteps coming along the corridor, and Lord Edgeware's voice saying to his valet,

‘I shall lie down for a few minutes, Stevens. Call me when lunch is ready.’

There was no time to lose ; and finding that I could not close the desk, I left it open. I was too late to escape from the room, and therefore had no other alternative but to conceal myself somewhere. Long heavy red repp curtains, which descended from the ceiling to the floor and hung loosely by the windows, were the only hiding-place I could find. I had scarcely time to envelope myself in their friendly folds, when Lord Edgeware entered. He was alone, and looked rather tired. The dose that I had given him being only half of what I in-

tended, its effect had been but to cause instantaneous sleep, and I feared at the time that he might awaken sooner than I expected. My fears were, you see, fully realised. Shutting the door, Lord Edgeware approached a sofa that stood near his bed, and was about to lie down, when he saw his writing-case open, and looking suspiciously as if it had been rifled. He seized hold of it, opened it, and finding that some one had tampered with its contents, uttered an oath, and was about to ring the bell for either his servant or a waiter.

My situation was far from pleasant. Should Lord Edgeware state that some one had rifled his case, the news of a robbery would spread like wildfire through the hotel, servants would enter his room, and I could hardly help being discovered. Detection under such circumstances would be for me a most disagreeable fate. I could make

no excuse for entering his lordship's rooms; and the mere fact of having concealed myself would plainly show that I desired to keep my presence secret, and that I had been about no good. And suppose search was made upon my person, should I not be self-condemned — caught red-handed, with the property of another in my possession? Might not also Lady Trevennis be implicated if the affair became public? There was only one course to adopt: I stepped from out my hiding-place. Lord Edgeware started and turned round, as if he had been shot.

‘May I beg your lordship not to ring the bell just at present?’ said I quietly.

‘Pray what the devil do you do here? Am I to connect your intrusion with the rifling of my desk?’ he asked savagely.

‘Your lordship’s conjecture is correct. I entered your room in the absence of your

servant, opened your writing-case, and took out the packet of letters,' said I, apparently calmly, though my heart was beating loudly with agitation.

The peer came near me, his limbs trembling with rage, and his bloodshot eyes glaring like a maniac's. With a frightful imprecation he asked me who I was.

'Mr. Henry Disney, an artist, whom six years ago your lordship tried to have assassinated by one Giovanni Leoni, an Italian bravo,' I answered, approaching him; and folding my arms, I returned his savage gaze coldly and steadily.

He became pale, and retreated a few paces from me, thinking I was going to do him bodily harm; for, notwithstanding all his bluster, he was an arrant coward.

'Your lordship need not be afraid,' said I scornfully. 'I did not come here to seek

a personal encounter. My revenge is perfectly satisfied with the possession of Lady Trevennis's letters.'

'Give me back that packet, fellow, or I'll rouse the whole hotel, and give you in charge as a thief.'

'If your lordship talks so loud, you *will* rouse the hotel, without any farther effort on your part. It will then be my painful duty to denounce you as a murderer. I have the confession of Leoni in my pocket, duly signed and countersigned by the prefect of the Roman police and the English minister. It was only your absence from Rome and the advice of the English there that made me hush-up the affair. I could not challenge your lordship a second time; for you know you have an awkward manner of taking an unfair advantage of your adversary by firing on him before the signal is given.'

‘What the h— is the meaning of all this?’ said his lordship, now purple with rage.

‘It means this, my lord: that hearing you hold some threat over Lady Trevennis this morning (for I was on the other side of the sea-wall, and your lordship’s voice attracted my attention, so that I listened attentively to all you had to say), owing to a certain packet of letters in your possession, I resolved, as Lady Trevennis is a patroness of mine, to defeat your object. The letters are now my property, and will be returned to Lady Trevennis at once; so that she may be out of the power of a man whom she so truly called a scoundrel.’

‘And pray what are you, man?’ said Lord Edgeware, in a trembling passion. ‘But I’m not going to bandy words with you, fellow. Give me back those letters, I say.’

‘I refuse.’

‘You refuse? And pray are you aware that I have only to summon the people of this hotel, and to force you, sir, to give up my property? I saw a policeman in the hotel as I came up.’

‘I should then let all the world know the contents of this document;’ and I took out of my pocket Leoni’s confession, and read it aloud to him. ‘The contents of this paper, my lord, would appear next Sunday in a journal which has of late been writing a series of articles against the aristocracy, and making remarkably free use of your name, whilst enlightening the masses with details of your private life, which I think your lordship, though not of a very modest character, would prefer to have kept secret. In making my theft—such is the word to use—public, the nature of the letters now in my possession would perhaps be divulged,



and I think Lady Trevennis, if you at all care about ingratiating yourself with her ladyship, would hardly thank you for bringing her name into public notice. Besides, your mean threat of holding these letters over a distinguished lady *in terrorem* would also come out. I think, on the whole, your lordship had better hesitate before taking the world into our confidence.'

He paused for a few moments, and his face lit up with a strange smile.

'Lady Trevennis desired you to obtain these letters?' he asked.

'She did not. Her ladyship knows nothing whatever of what I have just done. She does not yet know that I was present at your interview with her,' I readily lied. 'I accidentally overheard your threat to her, and I resolved to defeat your plan for—'

'You love Lady Trevennis, Mr. Disney?' said he, with strange quietness.

I burst out laughing. 'I am a poor artist whom Lady Trevennis is going to patronise; I shall return these letters to her ladyship, saying that I accidentally heard your threat to her, and secretly stole the packet which you professed gave you power over her. I hope that she will reward me by considerately extending her patronage to me. That is my love for Lady Trevennis, my lord.'

'And you think that owning yourself a thief will raise you in the estimation of Lady Trevennis,' said he sarcastically.

'I am perfectly indifferent whether it raises me in her estimation or not, so long as her patronage continues to raise me in my profession,' replied I, still lying. 'But I think that a lady once compromised will be only too thankful at seeing the cause for anxiety removed, without caring *very* much what means have been employed to free her,' I answered.

‘You think, then, those letters compromise Lady Trevennis?’ he asked.

‘It is very evident you think so, else you would not hold them over her as a threat,’ I said.

‘She is a charming woman, Lady Trevennis,’ said he banteringly, and regarding me with a cruel leer. ‘I wonder whether you will like her as much as the Del Monlini —’

‘I fail to understand your lordship,’ said I dryly.

‘*Sans doute,*’ he replied, equally dryly. ‘Let us, however, proceed to business. What is to be the drift of this charming and unexpected interview with you? You see I am not at all angry now. Suppose you keep those letters, and give them to your beloved Lady Trevennis—you may read them all if you like, and I am sure it will raise her highly in your estimation. Keep those

letters, I say ; but have the kindness to let us make an exchange by handing me over that confession of Leoni. I must own I should be sorry to see it in print.'

I was delighted, for it was exactly what I intended to propose.

'Agreed, my lord. I shall place these letters in the hands of Lady Trevennis this afternoon, and as soon as I am clear of all proofs of my guilt, I will give you the assassin's confession. If I gave you the document now, your lordship might tear it up, and then accuse me before the hotel of stealing your letters, without my having anything to keep you in check.'

'You are a cautious man, Mr. Disney.'

'It is necessary to be cautious when dealing with so distinguished a character as your lordship. Then, I presume, our interview may end?'

‘But how do I know that *you* will return me Leoni’s paper? You also seem to be a man who won’t stick at much.’

‘Very well; if we cannot trust one another—and I think we have excellent reason not to do so—let your lordship give me a written statement that you place Lady Trevennis’s letters in my hands, and I will now give you Leoni’s document.’

He at once complied with my wish; and whilst writing said, ‘Pray tell Lady Trevennis that I have no doubt that she and I will soon resume our interrupted correspondence;’ and he looked at me as if there was some hidden purport in his speech.

The paper placed in my hand, I gave him the document desired, which he at once burnt with a vesta.

‘And now have the kindness to quit my room,’ said he hastily.

As I walked out of his room, he called out, 'But didn't Leoni stick you somewhere? I heard he did.'

I took no notice of his question, and went to my room.





## CHAPTER IX.

### MY GENTLE COZ.

'Diaphenia, like the spreading roses,  
That in thy sweets all sweets encloses,  
Fair sweet, how I do love thee !  
I do love thee, as each flower  
Loves the sun's life-giving power ;  
For dead, thy breath to life might move me.

\* \* \* \*

I can give not what men call love :  
But wilt thou accept not  
The worship the heart lifts above  
And the heavens reject not ?'

**A**ND so the coveted letters were at last in my possession ! But at what a cost ! As I thought over the events that had occurred within the last few hours, I could hardly believe that I had stooped so low as to have committed such a base and treacherous act—an act more worthy of the villain in a transpon-

tine drama than of a man who, until now, had worn the white flower of a blameless life. Keenly I felt, as I held the packet in my hand, the reproaches of my conscience ; but, bitter as was the remorse I suffered, it was not sincere. I regretted the *necessity* that compelled me to commit such a deed ; but so deeply was I infatuated with Lady Trevennis, that in my heart I felt, that if occasion ever demanded a similar act to be repeated, I had only to be asked by my newly discovered *inamorata*, to be again her obedient but unprincipled slave.

I resolved at once to go to Coombe Royal, and place in the fair writer's hands her ill-fated correspondence. I paid greater attention than usual to my toilet that afternoon, and when I saw reflected in my mirror my tall shapely figure carefully dressed in the quiet style which I then affected, I flattered myself that I was as



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presentable as most men whom Lady Trevennis met in society. Before quitting my studio I knelt before my picture, and pressed my lips against those of my painting. 'Would that I could do the same to the original!' I murmured; but I checked the thought at once, as being decidedly unplatonic. Placing the precious packet in my pocket I descended the staircase, and entering a fly which always stood opposite to the hotel expecting a fare, drove off to Coombe Royal.

On my arrival, I was fortunate enough in finding Lady Trevennis at home. The servant ushered me into the drawing-room, and a few minutes afterwards her ladyship entered. She was pale, and looked nervous.

'You have come sooner than I expected, Mr. Disney! Have you been successful? Could you get the letters?' asked she, as she shook hands with me.

‘I am happy to say that I *have* been successful,’ said I, placing the packet in her hands.

She glanced at it for a moment with heightened colour, and then asked impulsively,

‘You have not read them?’

I drew myself up haughtily, and answered curtly,

‘I am a gentleman!’

No sooner was the sentence out of my mouth than I coloured deeply. How inconsistent had been my conduct with that which befits the bearer of such a title!

‘But your ladyship is quite right in asking me such a question,’ continued I bitterly; ‘a man who commits the act I have just done can hardly call himself a gentleman, though the designation is sufficiently ambiguous nowadays. And yet it was for you, madam, that I stooped so low.

No, Lady Trevennis, you will see the seals of your packet are intact. I have *not* read your letters !'

'O, Mr. Disney, what I uttered was only on the impulse of the moment ! Forgive me, pray ! Can you think that I really meant what I said ? — that I really meant to wound you — *you* to whom I owe so much ? No ! Sit down. Tell me how you obtained this packet ;' and she made room for me on the sofa by her side, whilst the deep blue eyes smiled so coquettishly upon me, that I forgot at once all my anger at her unhappy question.

I complied with her request, and told her everything (except the fact of having drugged Lord Edgeware, of which I was afterwards most woefully ashamed) about the means I had adopted to secure her letters.

She was silent for a few moments after

I had concluded all the particulars, and looked very grave and thoughtful. She then said,

‘Well, I am most deeply indebted to you, Mr. Disney, for having obtained these letters, at all events; though perhaps it would have been better for me if Lord Edgeware had not discovered you in the act of appropriating them. However, now that they are in my possession, his lordship can do me little harm. The reason that I set such store by these letters, Mr. Disney,’ and she placed her hand jealously on the packet, ‘is, that I hope this season will see me the acknowledged leader in society of the Progressist party, and these letters contain many unflattering observations on those who have lately become my greatest friends and supporters. Of course, their contents known, I should have been deserted by many whose influence is now everything

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to me in gaining the object of my ambition. You can, then, easily imagine how I dreaded Lord Edgeware carrying his threat into execution.'

'I am delighted to think that I have been the means of frustrating him,' said I.

'Indeed, I cannot tell you how deeply I feel myself indebted to you. I hope you will place it in my power to evince my gratitude to you. Is there anything I can do for you to advance you in your profession? Can I get you an appointment; my father is in the Cabinet?'

'You are very kind; but I can assure you I am not ambitious of any such reward. All I hope is, that, as I have had the pleasure of accidentally making your acquaintance, and of being fortunate enough in doing you a service, you will henceforth not look upon me as a stranger.'

'O, of course not; how could you think

time hence another opportunity of being of service to you, and that will always be a great pleasure to me.'

She was silent for a few moments; and then looking at me scrutinisingly, she said,

'Why, Mr. Disney, should being of service to me be any pleasure to you? I cannot understand why you should have gone through all this trouble and unpleasantness on my account, I really cannot.'

'Can you not? Do you remember the fable of the sculptor, who, having created a most beautiful statue, found to his astonishment that it was imbued with life, and ended by becoming the most devoted slave of his creation? My case is a parallel one. For months unwittingly I have been painting your features; and all of a sudden I meet you accidentally, and, lo, before me is my creation come to life! Like the

sculptor in the fable, I wish to be the slave of my creation ;' and I raised her fair white hand to my lips, and kissed its taper fingers.

'Mr. Disney,' replied Lady Trevennis softly, and withdrawing her hand, 'you have proved yourself already twice a real friend in need to me. I should be sorry if we ever should cease to be friends, especially after to-day.'

'And why should we ever cease to be friends?' asked I earnestly.

'Provided, Mr. Disney,' replied she, with a certain amount of hauteur, 'that you never confound friendship with flirtation, it will be from no fault of *mine* should our acquaintanceship ever drop.'

'I know too well what is due to Lady Trevennis and to myself ever to make such a confusion,' replied I proudly.

'I believe you, and trust you,' she said,

with emphasis. 'And now about this tutorship. You say you are a nephew of Canon Disney?'

I felt this was a feeler to know a little more about me.

'Yes. My father, a younger son of a baronet, was the rector of Lynscombe; but at his death left me almost penniless. My mother, who died soon after my birth, was a daughter of a Sir Westbourn O'Bois, an Irish baronet.'

'Sir Westbourn O'Bois!' cried Lady Trevennis in pleased astonishment; 'why, my father and your uncle, the present Sir Westbourn, are first-cousins!'

'Really? What a delightful surprise to me! Then you and I are cousins once removed! In Scotland that would be quite a near relationship!' exclaimed I.

'But we are in England, Mr. Disney,' said she dryly, 'and with us distant cousins



are no relations at all; and, in fact, it depends on their conduct entirely,' she continued, looking at me meaningly, 'whether they are even regarded as friends.'

She seemed to be sadly afraid of my flirting with her.

'But what a very extraordinary coincidence,' said I, 'it is, that we should be connected, is it not?'

And then the conversation turned on family matters, and I learnt who Lady Trevennis was. She was the only daughter of the Right Honourable George Faynix, a member of Lord Carney's ministry, and a distinguished statesman. Mr. Faynix was the second son of the eighth Earl of Kilmainham, and uncle of the present earl. He had married Lady Isabella Holcombe (the sister of Lady Ann), the eldest daughter of the Marquess of Dawlish, who died a few years after the birth of her daughter

Helen, now Lady Trevennis. At nineteen Miss Faynix was married to Sir John Trevennis, whom she met in London, and, as I afterwards heard, was almost compelled by her father, who was very poor, to accept the wealthy Devonshire baronet as her husband. One son, Reggie, was the result of this union; and on the little boy would devolve all the vast estates and immense wealth of the Trevennises. No wonder, then; that it was considered necessary that he should possess every advantage of education.

During the London season Lady Trevennis occupied Sir John's splendid new family mansion in Princes-gardens, along with her aunt Lady Ann and Mr. Faynix; the latter, during the absence of the Admiral, did the honours as the host in his daughter's house. It was here that I was to take up my abode if I succeeded in be-

coming Reggie's tutor, as Mr. Faynix wished his grandson to live in town for the next three months. Lady Trevennis said she felt sure that Mr. Faynix would be only too glad to avail himself of my services, and that the obligation was on their side, and not on mine. From a few remarks that fell from Lady Trevennis, I was sure that she was aware of the insanity in my family; and I thought it better to tell her frankly the exact state of the case, as the fact of such a malady might perhaps prejudice her against my being her son's tutor. It did not, however; but, on the contrary, caused her to regard me in a more tender and sympathetic light.

'And you would *really* wish to be Reggie's tutor?' asked she, as I rose to take my farewell.

'I really wish to be,' replied I.

'Very well; I will write to Mr. Faynix

about it in a day or two, and let you know his answer as soon as it arrives,' said she.

'Then I suppose I may expect you next Thursday to see my picture—or rather your picture?' asked I.

'Do you know when Lord Edgeware leaves the Trevennis Hotel?' said she.

'This afternoon, I believe,' I replied.

'Very well, Mr. Disney; you may expect Lady Ann and me next Thursday, when I hope to be enchanted with my portrait.'

After a few more words we parted. I remember saying to myself, as I crossed the park, 'If love is the constant wish to be with the object beloved, then I *am* in love! What an age it seems to next Thursday!'

On my return to Weedoncliffe, I found that Lord Edgeware had returned to London.

On the day appointed, Lady Trevennis, accompanied by her aunt, arrived at the hotel, and was ushered into my drawing-

room studio by Mr. Newton himself; the old hypocrite bowing down to the ground, and as obsequious and servile as if he were a stage-manager receiving royalty.

My picture stood on its easel in an excellent light; and the moment the ladies cast their eyes upon it, they showed as much enthusiasm about it as was consistent with good breeding.

Lady Ann knitted her brows, put her head on one side in the attitude of a most hypercritical connoisseur, and walked almost all over the room to place herself in a good position the better to examine my study carefully, till I took her by the hand and told her where to stand.

‘It is wonderfully like! wonderfully like! most surprising!’ murmured the old lady; ‘why, if Lady Trevennis had stood to you for her own portrait, it could not be more like! And you never saw my niece

till you came here? Most surprising! Well, truth is stranger than fiction! What do you say, Helen?"

Lady Trevennis had stood before my picture in perfect silence. I could see by the smile on her lips and the light in her eyes that she was pleased with it. She looked long and almost lovingly on her counterpart, as if she were gazing at her reflection in a mirror. With the exception of a few finishing touches to the arms and drapery, my picture was almost complete. To one who was not an artist, it would perhaps have appeared perfectly so; but there was still a good deal to be done before I could sign at the bottom of it 'Disney fecit.' I wanted to catch Lady Trevennis's peculiar cast of the mouth, and the exact expression of her eyes, before I could call it exactly her portrait. Lady Trevennis, however, thought that the likeness was

complete, and it was only when I showed her one by one the points as yet unfinished, that she was convinced that work had still to be done.

‘Have I done you justice?’ I asked softly.

‘Too much so,’ replied she, laughing; ‘I shall quite dread to see my reflection in my mirror after this. You have flattered me too much, Mr. Disney.’

‘Perfection can never be flattered, but only reproduced,’ replied I. ‘I am glad that my reproduction pleases you.’

She admired very much the colouring of my study, and considered the pose most graceful. As the figure leant on its clasped hands, with the head slightly bent, there was a happy mixture of light and shade which gave an earnest softened look to its gaze. I preferred it to Romney’s portrait of Lady Hamilton, because I thought the pose of my

figure less stiff, and I felt sure that the manner in which I had painted its complexion was infinitely superior to the high-coloured, almost dauby look of Lady Hamilton. Perhaps you will say self-praise is no recommendation; but you know that what I write now has been fully supported by public opinion.

‘Can you give me half an hour’s sitting now, Lady Trevennis?’ I asked.

‘Certainly: I came for the purpose,’ replied she.

She took off her coquettish Louis-Quatorze little hat with its long streaming heron feather, and sable-trimmed jacket, and then said,

‘Am I to sit or to stand?’

I placed her against a tall cabinet, and asked her to rest her elbows on its top and her face on her hands, and to look at me.



She obeyed my directions; and I with some difficulty repressed a slight sensation of nervousness as I felt Lady Trevennis's large earnest blue eyes fixed intently upon me, whilst I, alternately looking at her and at my picture, proceeded with my painting.

'When will the picture be finished?' asked my beautiful model.

'In another three weeks,' replied I.

'And how often do you wish me to sit to you?'

'About half-a-dozen times — say three times a week for the next fortnight; if it suits you?'

'O, that will do very well. When it is finished, I think it will be very much admired.'

'If it is exactly like the original, it cannot fail to be so,' I answered gaily. 'May I ask you to turn your head a little?'

'I am afraid you will turn my head a

great deal, if you continue to compliment me so,' laughed she.

I went on with my picture, whilst our conversation became general. Lady Ann was sitting behind me, regarding my progress with great interest. That excellent lady highly approved of my being Reggie's tutor, and since I was related to the family, was even more friendly to me than before. She felt sure that her brother-in-law would be very glad of my services, and hoped for my sake that Mr. Faynix might eventually 'do something for me.' I, however, told her that my ambition was very homœopathically inclined, and content with little.

'To be contented with one's lot,' said she gravely, 'is an excellent thing.'

'But to be contented with one's little is still more excellent,' replied I, laughing. 'Many thanks, Lady Trevennis; your sitting—or rather your standing—is over for

the present,' said I at the end of about three-quarters of an hour.

The following Monday was fixed for their next visit, and I was asked to Coombe Royal to dinner on Sunday.

At the end of the fortnight my picture was so exactly like Lady Trevennis, that it would have been impossible to have guessed that it had not been intended for her originally. With the exception of the varnishing and the framing, my 'Portrait of a Lady,' as Lady Trevennis desired me to label my study, was at last almost complete.

At the same time that Lady Trevennis came to give me her last sitting, she brought me a letter from her father, accepting me as his grandson's tutor.



## CHAPTER X.

### AT PRINCES-GARDENS.

‘Marry, what a world of pomp and state!’

**N**OW pass on to the happiest days of my life—the days I spent at Princes - gardens. A week after the interview with Lady Trevennis, just related in my last chapter, I received a letter from Mr. Faynix, in which he cordially accepted my proposal of becoming his grandson’s tutor. He expressed his pleasure at having the assistance of one who was a connection of his, and who at the same time had so distinguished himself at Oxford. He had received, he said, a most excellent account of my character and abilities from the head of my college,

who was also an intimate friend of his; and it had induced him to appoint me his private secretary, as well as tutor to little Reggie, in order that my abilities might have some more congenial occupation than the being confined entirely to the elementary education of a young lad. Ample time would also be allowed me to pursue my art. Nothing could be kinder or more cordial than the tone of this letter; nothing more considerate. He desired me, if it were convenient, to return to town as soon as possible, and do him the favour of bringing his grandson with me. He was now busily engaged with his parliamentary and official duties, and my assistance would be most useful.

I showed Mr. Faynix's letter to Lady Trevennis, and she advised me to quit Weedoncliffe the following day. There was nothing to cause me to stay any longer

from town; my picture was well-nigh finished, and would be ready in a week to send in for inspection to the Academy; my health was restored; and both Lady Trevennis and Lady Ann would be starting for London in another ten days. It was just as well that I should feel fully settled before the arrival of the ladies; and as for my pupil, he was enchanted at the idea of going up to London. I wrote to Mr. Faynix, to say that I should be with him on the following Thursday, and be accompanied by Reggie.

Already my pupil and I were great friends. He showed me his pony, his butterfly collection, and his two Newfoundland puppies; we sailed his little boat on the lake, had a game at ball together; and in fact in all his amusements, and whenever the little man had anything new to show, my presence was absolutely indispensable.

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‘I am so glad you are going to teach me, Mr. Disney; I like you very much! I like grand-aunt Ann and grandpapa, but I don’t like mamma,’ said he to me in the train when *en route* for London.

‘Hush! you mustn’t say that!’

‘But I *will* say it; and I say, Mr. Disney, I know papa doesn’t like mamma, and that’s the reason nurse Ellen says he’s always on board of his ship.’

‘Nurse Ellen should not talk like that, Reggie.’

‘O, but she always does; she’s another who doesn’t like mamma. Nurse says it’s only fine gentlemen who like mamma; for it’s only fine gentlemen whom mamma likes. You like mamma, Mr. Disney, I know.’

‘And pray, my little man, how do you know?’

‘O, because you talk so softly and nicely to her, and look at her just like Lord Edge-

ware and Captain Dorset and Lord Carnation and other fine gentlemen. Papa doesn't talk so nicely to mamma as you and they do. When mamma does anything he doesn't like, he always says, "O, confound it, Helen!" Ah, I wish I were papa; so that when mamma whips me for not doing my lessons, or for making a noise in the nursery, I could say, "O, confound it, Helen!" too.'

'You naughty boy, Reggie; you mustn't use words like that!'

'Papa uses them, and he's not naughty; he's a good dear man; it's only mamma that's naughty. I say, Mr. Disney, are you a fine gentleman?'

'No, Reggie; I am a very poor gentleman, else I should not be coming to teach you.'

'Never mind; I shall be very rich, and then I will give you—O, ever so much money, because I like you! Give me another bun, please.'



He was a delicate, self-willed, precocious little boy, and his childish prattle not only amused me, but at the same time now and then gave me hints which plainly showed which way the wind blew both at Coombe Royal and Princes-gardens.

On arriving at the station, a well-appointed brougham was waiting for us; and in less than half an hour we were at Princes-gardens. Mr. Faynix received me most kindly, and I felt that it would be from no fault of his if I were not at home in my new quarters. He was delighted that accident had brought us together; for my mother was a favourite cousin of his, and her loss, he said, had been a severe blow to him. I was to regard him as a relation; and if in any way he could be of service—should I wish afterwards to devote myself entirely to my profession—I was not to scruple about asking him to exercise any interest he might

possess. His treatment of me was Irish kindness and hospitality itself. Before I had been a couple of days in his society, I felt as if I had known him all my life, and Princes-gardens had always been my home.

Mr. Faynix was a tall thin gentleman-like-looking man, with a bald head, broad massive forehead with the perceptive and acquisitive faculties strongly developed, large gray eyes with the eyelids slightly drooping, a Roman nose, a short upper lip, large mouth well furnished with strong white teeth, and a chin full of resolution. He was about sixty years of age, and rather an elderly dandy in his dress and manner. His hands were white and well shaped, and his feet almost small enough to have satisfied a China woman. He was very proud of these extremities, and had a knack, when talking to you, of stroking his cheek with his left hand, in order the better to display his beautifully curved

palm and taper fingers, with their filbert nails pink as the inner leaves of a rose. He also, when seated, frequently extended his legs at full length, and balanced his feet on his heels, so that the Arabian instep and small well-fitting boot might be seen and envied by all. He had a walk, laugh, and air peculiar to the bucks who modelled themselves after the fashion of George IV. Without being handsome, he was very distinguished-looking; and his courtly manners, his antiquated way of pronouncing certain English words, and the extreme deference—slightly overdone—he invariably paid to ladies, made me regard him as one of the best specimens of a gentleman of the old school that I had ever come across. After a farther acquaintance I found him to be very selfish, very unscrupulous, and as full of prejudices as my father; only—like a true man of the world—he hid carefully his

failings, and it was only when you offended him that he showed himself in his true colours. He was then malicious and unforgiving.

He had early devoted himself to politics, and very shortly after he quitted Cambridge he entered Parliament, through the Earl of Kilmainham's interest. There he identified himself with the Progressist party, and was soon looked upon as a 'rising young man.' A fluent speaker, of some scholarship, and with the usual amount of wit and absence of principle that generally characterise his countrymen, he soon became a useful man to his party. He was listened to with attention in the House, and his attendance upon committees was eagerly desired. On five different occasions he had held subordinate posts in the ministry, and in each office that he controlled he had established various beneficial reforms. The

people believed in him ; the Progressist press lauded him to the skies ; the philosophers and the mercantile classes said he was the right man in the right place ; and, in fact, he obtained popularity because he courted it. The *Trimmer* wrote him up as an able scholar and a useful statesman ; the *Malignant* (the editor had been disappointed by Faynix about a commissionership, and had since gone through the Bankruptcy Court) wrote him down as an unprincipled adventurer, who always identified his own interests with those of the nation ; and the *Seed of Discord*—the Low-church religious paper—called him an infidel, and begged its readers to pray for him ; the *Alma Mater*—the High-church organ—regretted that a man who was a notorious free-thinker, and the earnest supporter of all sceptical scientific inquiries, should have a voice in the government of the country. But Mr.

Faynix—knowing the feeling of the nation to be in favour of Progressist principles—paid little heed to his enemies, as long as they were a powerless minority. On the contrary, he liked their abuse: it was the shadow of his success. Besides, did not the *Mixobarbarus*, the *People's Tricolor*, the *Weekly Cadger*, say that he was a most able and conscientious statesman, and the true friend of the people?

On the formation of Lord Carney's ministry, he was offered the Board of Procrastination, with a seat in the Cabinet. It was as President of the Board that I first made his acquaintance, and a few days after my arrival I was initiated by him into my new duties.

They were not very heavy. At his office in Whitehall he employed an official private secretary, and my department was confined entirely to his private work. I wrote letters

to his constituents, to begging-letter writers, to friends who wanted him to get an appointment for them, and friends who, not wanting anything, gave him advice; I made occasional abstracts of special Blue-books, culled information from various works, and ransacked the pages of *Hansard* for his speeches, which he carefully prepared and learnt by heart; sometimes I had to receive deputations for him, and to concoct his answers to them; and perhaps once a week he would wish me to be present at his office, or in the lobby of the House. But on the whole, I found out that I had ample time to devote to my little pupil, and to go on with my painting.

Master Reggie came to me only in the morning for about two hours; and if he ever did any more lessons, it was reading a little English with the housekeeper sometimes in the afternoon. He was a quick

intelligent child, and had rather to be kept back than to be put in the way of acquiring new information. His little brain was always working, and he was never so satisfied as when asking questions. A merry high-spirited child, it required all my authority to keep him in order; but I fear I was far from exercising a very rigid control over him, for the little fellow and I were too fond of each other to be master and pupil. However, I took very great care not to teach him things that he would have to unlearn.

I threw away his *Markham* with all its early-English nonsense, and wrote out myself for him a little History of England. His geography shared the same fate; it was a wonderful little book, which told its readers that the 'universe was surrounded by water,' and that the 'world was divided into four quarters, to which a fifth had lately been added, called Australasia,'



and other such stuff. The author was a fellow of half-a-dozen learned societies and a doctor of philosophy; but fortunately no university man.

I endeavoured to place education before Reggie in as simple and agreeable a light as possible; and on all subjects I taught him to think for himself, and work out by his own little mind answers to the questions he proposed to me. Mr. Faynix expressed his entire satisfaction with my plan; and as for Lady Trevennis, she said she had such entire confidence in my abilities, that she left everything to me as regarded her son, and never bothered herself about him.

And, indeed, she did not trouble herself about him. It was the one trait in her character that, deeply prejudiced though I was in her favour, and blinded by my passion so, that I refused to think or believe ill about her, I most disapproved of.

She was as indifferent to her child as if she were not his mother. I overheard her answer one day, when a lady took her to task about her neglect in this respect, 'I pay quite as much attention to my child as other mothers do to theirs,' said she. *Other mothers*, meaning fashionable or would-be fashionable women, who give ten minutes to the nursery and ten hours to the world. No wonder Belgravian and Tyburnian mammas are always complaining of the inattention of their nurses; for if mothers are indifferent about the welfare of their offspring, it is not very likely that hired and mercenary attendants will be influenced by higher feelings of devotion.

The demands of society, however, occupied all the time of Lady Trevennis, and engrossed all her attention. She was, as she had told me, using every effort to occupy the position lately vacated by a distinguished

peeress as the leader of the Progressist world. Her father's position in the Cabinet, her beauty, her large fortune, the splendid hospitalities of Double Zero House (for so 00 Princes-gardens was called), and above all, her happy knack of assembling in her rooms men eminent in art and literature, or distinguished by birth, fortune, or fashion, perfectly justified her in aiming at this lofty and fashionable post. But between her and the object of her ambition stood a woman of superior position and fortune to herself, and of equal beauty, who also advanced pretensions to this leadership.

And, indeed, the Marchioness of St. James was a most formidable rival. People said that if it were not for Lady St. James, Lady Trevennis would be the recognised social leader of the party, and *vice versa*. As it was, the leadership was still vacant, on account of the conflicting claims of the

rivals being so equally supported. There were therefore two kings in Brentford; and the wives of vulgar Members, who hoped to struggle into society through the friendly portals of Ministerial receptions, paid divided court at Blanche House on Saturdays and at Double Zero House on Wednesdays. Lady St. James had the better choice of days, or rather nights; an advantage which Lady Trevennis greatly coveted. I think I need hardly say that these two ladies, with the usual amiability of the sex towards one another, hated each other most cordially.

Lady St. James was by birth nobody. Her father, a Mr. Sucker, had been a small solicitor in Gray's-inn; but finding that the profession of the law, though sufficiently dishonest for an unscrupulous mind, was not so profitable as he wished, he gave up his legal practice at Gray's-inn, and took chambers in Bond-street—in other words

turned money-lender. The interest he demanded not being quite so high as that of the vampires surrounding him who plied the same dirty trade; and the fact also being known, that when you had to take the half of the sum required in sherry or pictures, the sherry was very drinkable, and the pictures found ready purchasers,—the business of Mr. Sucker soon began to prosper and bring forth fruit abundantly. Mr. Sucker was a thorough man of the world, and bore with calm serenity the abuse or politeness of his friends. He was accustomed to be accosted by men of birth and fashion, whom temporary misfortune brought to his door, in all manner of addresses. Now it was, ‘Mr. Sucker, would you have the kindness,’ &c.; or perhaps, ‘There, you damned old thief, take back your ill-gotten gains.’ But it was all the same to Mr. Sucker—he never lost his temper, and he seldom lost his money.

After several years passed in this anxious, but, on the whole, highly lucrative occupation, Mr. Sucker resolved to retire from business. His fortune was colossal, his tastes were epicurean, and having no conscience his digestion was excellent; he accordingly saw no reason why he should not pass the rest of his days in enjoyment. Like many *parvenus*, he had a weakness for land; his ambition was to be enrolled among the landed gentry of the kingdom, and that his two children—a boy and a girl—should make brilliant marriages. But Mr. Sucker, knowing perfectly well that his past profession would hardly be an introduction to the best county families, eschewed carefully Yorkshire, Suffolk, Norfolk, and Devonshire, and bought a splendid estate in Midlandshire, where the landed gentry are neither very ancient nor very particular.

But Midlandshire, though not very ex-

clusive, said they must 'draw the line somewhere,' and they accordingly drew the line at Mr. Sucker. But our keen usurer took not the slightest notice of the cold shoulder presented to him on every occasion by the county. He contented himself with obtaining an excellent *local* character. He was a good and kind landlord, extremely charitable, took a great interest in agricultural meetings and ploughing matches, and erected a drinking-fountain, and a new wing to the infirmary, in his parish town. He became extremely popular among the lower classes in his neighbourhood, and, to the astonishment of the exclusive county, was returned as one of the members for Brixborough (his county town) to Parliament. Mr. Sucker was delighted at the honour conferred on him; for, as he very truly said, 'A man in this country can't be happy unless he's got money; and when he's got

money, dammy, he ain't happy till he's got either rank or position.' The legislative initials M.P. gave him position, and he was at once made free of the county. He kept a pack of hounds, was lavish in his hospitalities, had splendid shooting, which he strictly preserved, went to church most religiously, and was, in fact, a model country gentleman.

His son went to Christchurch as a gentleman commoner, and all his friends were lords and squires of high degree. His keen sense of humour, and his respect for bibliography, caused him one night, with some choice spirits, to light a bonfire in the ancient library of his college, and to colour with charcoal and red ochre a few invaluable busts and statues. For this trifling eccentricity of temperament he was requested to withdraw his society from Oxford. He gladly complied with



the Dean's request, and obtained a commission in that crack cavalry regiment the 'Queen's own Prancers,' where he greatly distinguished himself in several severe campaigns at Hounslow, Windsor, York, Dublin, Edinburgh, and other British towns, where (love) engagements were going on.

Miss Sucker, a very beautiful girl, on whom no money had been spared to endow her with every accomplishment, married, much to Mr. Sucker's disgust, Captain Cannon O'Poole (Lord Starone's eldest son), who was in her brother's regiment. But, after two years of wedded life, his arduous military duties (combined with whisky in excess) carried off the gallant captain, leaving his wife a most captivating widow. The Hon. Mrs. O'Poole was not, however, inconsolable; she had married full of girlish enthusiasm and Byronic notions of love, and found, shortly after marriage, that matri-

mony for affection was a snare and a delusion.

‘Next time I marry,’ said the prudent and warm-hearted widow, ‘it shall be for something tangible. Of course Fred’ (her husband), ‘being poor, was obliged to live a good deal on papa ; but I do not see why his father and uncles should have followed his example. No ; next time I marry, I shall take for my husband a great name, and one of a powerful family.’

She confided in her father, who perfectly agreed with her.

‘My darling, you are only four-and-twenty, and you know as well as I do that your beauty is uncommon. Don’t be in a hurry about your next step ; and if you want to marry a great man, there is nothing like a rather elderly statesman who knows the world, and who, like most elderly gentlemen, would easily fall in love with so

young and beautiful a girl as you are, and whom you could turn round your finger just as you choose.'

The Marquis of St. James was at that time a gay old buck of about fifty-five. He had early entered diplomacy, been secretary of legation almost all over Europe, then ambassador to four leading European powers successively, and on two distinct occasions he had been appointed to represent his sovereign in investing with the insignia of the 'Star of Glory' two powerful monarchs. He was therefore a most distinguished man, and the lovers of music were more indebted to him than to anybody for discovering *prima donnas*.

He had lost his wife some five years ago, which unkind friends said had made him look ten years younger; and as an ambassador who was a widower could not so well sustain the dignity of his sovereign as a married

one, he returned to England, and was appointed Lord-Keeper of the Powder-Box. Mr. Sucker had made his acquaintance at a Drawing-room, where he had accompanied his daughter Mrs. O'Poole on her presentation. As the noble peer fulfilled the duties of his office by arranging the train of that lady with his wand, and gracefully touching her delicate face with the powder-puff before entering the Presence, he thought he had never seen—not even in the different courts in which he had been so distinguished an ornament—such perfect beauty. His heart was deeply touched—or rather what he mistook for his heart. He increased his acquaintance with Mr. Sucker, and became his friend. Everywhere he raved about the beautiful Mrs. O'Poole—not a woman in London, Paris, St. Petersburg, or Vienna, could be compared to her.

His friends at Boodle's feared that he

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was 'going to make an awful fool of himself,' and gave him friendly advice. But advice contrary to what he wished only fanned the flame of the amorous peer, and made him long the more to possess the beauty he so much admired. He met her everywhere (for our friend Mr. Sucker was becoming a shining light in London society, and his home in Rutland-gate, presided over by his lovely daughter, was considered to be one of the most agreeable houses in town); and whenever Mrs. O'Poole met the most noble the Marquis of St. James, she flirted and coquetted with him so, that the old boy got purple in the face with suppressed joy, and showed all his false teeth as he grinned with delight. He no longer hovered about Lady Trevennis, or Lady Sapphira Cymbal, or Mrs. Myra de Brasse, his former platonic loves; it was only Mrs. O'Poole that chained him to her feet. The result was, as all his

friends had anticipated, 'he made an awful fool of himself;' and one fine morning Mrs. O'Poole changed her name for the Marchioness of St. James.

As old fogies read at the Travellers' or at Boodle's, 'Marriage in high life this day,' in the evening paper, and perused a long and high-flown account of the marriage between 'the most noble the Marquis of St. James and the beautiful and accomplished Mrs. O'Poole, only daughter of the wealthy member for Bribyborough,' they remarked, 'Well, there is never such a fool as an old one; but St. James always was a fool after he became ambassador; English diplomacy begad is enough to make a fool of anybody nowadays who tries to carry it out.'

The Marquis, however, had no reason to complain of his lot. The Marchioness made him an excellent wife, and took every opportunity of fanning the dying embers

of his ambition. Uxorious to a degree, St. James gladly complied with every hint of his wife; and shortly after his marriage, a vacancy arising in the Cabinet, he was appointed Secretary of State for Foreign Confusion. It was whilst her husband was filling this arduous post that the Marchioness resolved to compete for the social leadership of the Progressist world. After a brief but smart competition, the race became limited to a trial of social strength between the Marchioness of St. James and Lady Trevennis. As yet their rival claims were pretty equally supported.

The above details were told me by Lady Trevennis, with various spiteful digressions respecting the Marchioness, which plainly testified to me, had I not known the fact before, that when one woman hates another, she forgets good taste and every semblance of charity, and very often that rare com-

modity which, on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle, we call 'common justice.'

I had a suite of very comfortable rooms on the ground-floor; my chief apartment, which was well furnished, and had books, busts, bronzes, pictures in tasteful profusion, looked out on to a long strip of grass, with smoky lilac-trees and shrubs at its back, called the garden. Occasionally, when writing or painting, Lady Trevennis would do me the honour of paying me a visit to ask my advice with regard to several subjects; and then would stay and have a chat. Sometimes she would smile upon me and call me playfully 'cousin Harry,' and then I was happy for days.

My picture had been sent in, and was accepted by the Academy; and I was looking forward to the first of May with some curiosity and anxiety. Lady Trevennis and her friends were perfectly satisfied that the



portrait would be a great success, and told me not to feel at all anxious. Fortunately, during those days of suspense, I was so fully engaged, that I had little time to worry myself with conjecturing the opinions of the critics and the public. Little Reggie and the business of Mr. Faynix occupied very few hours of my time; and had it not been for additional duties forced on me by Lady Trevennis, my leisure would have been ample. However, her ladyship had taken it into her head that I could be very useful to her and her friends in assisting her views of social ambition. Accordingly, no sooner had I commenced to sketch, or to loll on my sofa and enjoy the quiet of repose or the luxury of reading, than a servant informed me that Lady Trevennis wished to see me. And then, either in her boudoir or in one of the drawing-rooms, was milady holding a cabinet council with her

friends; and it became my lot to listen gravely to what she or her friends said, to compose letters, and occasionally to give my opinion on the expediency of some question or other. It was a great compliment to me; but 'cousin Harry' was a rather important person in Double Zero House at that time.

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5



